



NANCY TREVANION'S LEGACY:

POPULAR NOVELS

BY

JOSEPH HOCKING

THE STORY OF ANDREW FAIRFAX
ISHMAEL PENGELLY: AN OUTCAST
THE MONK OF MAR SABA
ZILLAH
JABEZ RASTERBROOK
ALL MEN ARE LIARS
FIELDS OF FAIR RENOWN
WEAPONS OF MYSTERY
THE PURPLE ROBE
THE SCARLET WOMAN
THE BIRTHRIGHT
MISTRESS NANCY MOLESWORTH
AND SHALL TRELAWNEY DIE?
LEST WE FORGET
GREATER LOVE
ESAU
THE COMING OF THE KING
ROGER TREWINION
THE PRINCE OF THIS WORLD
GOD AND MAMMON
AN ENEMY HATH DONE THIS
THE RING OF DESTINY
HEARTSEASE
THE TENANT OF CROMLECH
COTTAGE

NANCY TREVANION'S LEGACY

BY
JOSEPH HOCKING.

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NANCY TREVANION'S LEGACY

CHAPTER I

THE TREVANIONS

NANCY TREVANION was more than twenty-one years of age. She was a bright, happy girl, and up to the time this story commences had scarcely known what trouble meant. Fortune had been specially kind to her. She had perfect health, many friends, and was a favourite in the district where she lived. She was more than ordinarily intelligent too, and old Felix Trevanion, her father, had not only sent her to one of the best schools in the country, but had afterwards arranged for her to go to Newnham College, through which she had passed with distinction. While according to the unreasoning and unreasonable usages of our older Universities she had not been allowed to take her degree, she had obtained certificates which were of more value than most of the degrees taken by members of the more fortunate sex.

Thus, when she returned to Trevanion Court after leaving Newnham, she was regarded by her friends not only as more than ordinarily clever, but as almost a prodigy of learning.

Not that Nancy boasted of her scholastic attainments, she was not that kind of girl. Besides, she was prouder of her handicap at golf, and her prowess at tennis, than of being a wrangler. In short, Nancy was a winsome, healthy, pleasure-loving girl. She was a fair musician, a good dancer, a fine rider, added to which she possessed artistic abilities beyond the ordinary. More than once artists had pronounced her sketches to have great pro-

mise, and had besought her not to neglect this gift with which Nature had endowed her."

What wonder, then, that Nancy was of a bright disposition? She had only to look at her mirror to know that she was fair to look upon, while the fact that more than one young man had given her longing looks, and from the way they sought her society, made her realize that she was indeed favoured among mortals.

Then, suddenly, the blow came.

Coming down to breakfast one morning she saw that her father's place at the table was empty.

"Father is late," she remarked to old Adam Trebilcock, who had acted as butler and general factotum in the house as long as she could remember.

"I am afraid your father is not well, Miss Nancy," replied the old man in a troubled voice.

"Not well! What do you mean?"

"He looked terrible bad when I took him his hot water," replied old Adam, "and he told me he was not coming down to breakfast."

"Not coming down to breakfast! I will go to him at once."

"Please, Miss Nancy, he said he hoped you wouldn't. He wants you to have your breakfast as usual, and then he will be glad if you will go to his room. He seemed to have something on his mind, Miss Nancy."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I don't like the look on his face," and the old man's voice trembled; "and there was something strange in his eyes."

Without another word Nancy rushed from the room and flew to her father's bedside.

"What's the matter, father?" cried the girl, terror-stricken at the sight which met her gaze. But Felix Trevanion did not speak; he lay looking at his daughter with fear-haunted eyes, while a ghastly pallor had overspread his face.

"Father, tell me!" cried the girl as she kissed him,

"There is not much to tell," replied the man. "I have known for months it was coming, but I did not think it would be as soon as this."

like most modern girls she had been led to regard expressions of love as maudlin and silly. All the same, in spite of the great disparity in their ages, she loved him dearly, and spoke of him as her best friend. Her mother had died while she was still a baby, and Felix Trevanion had never married again. Felix had married late in life. He had avoided women during his earlier manhood, and he was past fifty when he had led Emily Polperro to the altar. She was but a young girl, and was, as more than one had remarked, utterly unfitted to be the wife of such a man. Two years after their marriage, Nancy had been born, and within a year of her birth he was left a widower. Whether his married life had been happy or not no one knew. He had never been a man who spoke of his private affairs, neither was he one who wore his heart upon his sleeve.

Felix Trevanion had been spoken of as one of the proudest men in Cornwall. Bearing one of the oldest names in the history of the county, he held his head high, and although unable to take his place among large landowners, he regarded himself as being equal if not superior to any of them. Prominent in the library was the Trevanion family tree, and Nancy had been early taught to trace her ancestry back into the dim past.

"We Trevanions are not of yesterday," he told her proudly. "Before these rich parvenus were ever heard of the Trevanions were a great people. Don't forget that, Nancy, my dear," and although Nancy was by no means a snob, she could not help being proud of her old name.

She loved her home too, and although Trevanion Court could not be called a mansion, the place was dearer to her than any other could be. At one time it was the centre of a great estate. Parklands, rich farms, wooded hills and dales, and beyond them great moorlands stretched, all owned by the Trevanions. But those days had gone. Trevanion Court, although still regarded as one of the loveliest houses in the county, was no longer associated with wide domains. Only two hundred acres belonged to it now, and the house was spoken of as a "white elephant."

"Wha's the use of a great 'ouse like that?" remarked the neighbouring farmers. "It's only a big expense, and no use 'toal."

Nevertheless, Felix and Nancy loved it with an almost passionate love, and the latter had often declared that there was no place on earth like it.

This was no wonder. Built of granite, which had become lichen-covered through the centuries, it was a dream of architecture; a poem set in the stone for which Cornwall is famous. A long row of pillars stood at its front supporting the upper story. Here in the old days ladies had paraded with gallant cavaliers by their sides. In the courtyard at the rear historical scenes had taken place, while more than once, kings had slept beneath its roof. The long rows of mullioned windows were said to be finer than those at Haddon Hall in Derbyshire, and, looking out of them, one saw an avenue of wide-spreading gnarled trees which had stood there for centuries. It might be only a farm-house, but it was glorious in its history and in its associations.

Nancy felt all this while she sat in the room awaiting the doctor's coming. It was true the glory of the family had gone, but she was still a Trevanion, and lived in the old home.

Presently the doctor arrived, and she saw by the glance he gave her father how gravely he regarded his condition.

"Will you leave us a few minutes?" he requested her after he had been some little time in the room.

An hour later, when Dr. Stephens drove away, she knew that what her father feared was true.

"We must hope for the best, Nancy," he said; "but I am afraid he will not be with us more than a few hours. Yes, you can go to him now; indeed, he wants you. Don't let him excite himself if you can help it, and make him happy as only you can."

She crept back to the room with leaden feet; she did not know what he had to tell her, but she felt that to her the end of the world had come.

CHAPTER II

FAMILY PRIDE

"YOU are feeling better, Dad, aren't you?" she said, speaking cheerfully, and with a suggestion of her old smile resting on her face.

He did not answer in words, but took her hand and looked into her tear-dimmed eyes.

"My darling; my little darling," he murmured; "it's hard to tell you."

"What's hard, Dad?"

He was silent for a few seconds and then said, "I did it for the best, or what I believed was for the best. I hoped and struggled as long as I could, but—but there——"

"Don't worry, whatever it is, Dad," and she continued to speak cheerfully. "It'll all come right."

He gave a quick glance round the room; noted the shabby furniture, the worn carpet, and stained wall-paper. Then he sighed.

"It's a fine old room, isn't it?" he said.

The girl did not reply.

"This old bedstead," he went on, glancing at the huge four-poster whereon he lay, "is not a thing of yesterday. Why, King Charles slept on it; but it'll have to be sold."

"Sold! What do you mean, Dad?"

"It's hard to tell you, my dear, and—and I kept it to myself as long as I could," he repeated. "I have been foolish, worse than foolish; I know I have. What do old families matter? What is a man better for being able to trace his family tree farther back than Edward the Confessor? And yet I have been proud of it. It's all nonsense, and yet I have gloried in it. This old house

is altogether unfitted for a farmer, farming two hundred acres of land. I should have been far better off with an up-to-date farm-house, just big enough for my needs; but I have stuck to this."

"Of course you have, Dad; you had reason to."

"You love it, don't you?"

"Love it!" cried the girl. "I love every stone of it, every pillar, every window. As for that old avenue of trees, there isn't another like it."

Felix Trevanion looked at her tenderly, and something like satisfaction came into his eyes.

"Ah," he murmured, "I am glad of that; perhaps it will help you to forgive me."

"Dad, what *do* you mean? What is there to forgive?"

"I have tried to keep it for you," he murmured; "tried hard. I have scrimped, and struggled, and saved to have you brought up as you should be brought up; I have done all that was in my power; but it was no use; it'll all have to go."

She wanted to ask him questions, but the words would not pass her lips. What the doctor had told her had stunned her, bewildered her, while the look on her father's face made her forgetful of almost everything else.

"Nancy, my darling," went on old Felix, feebly, "I had hoped that you would always be able to live here; I had hoped that no one but a Trevanion would live at Trevanion Court, but—but— Give me a few more of those drops, will you? I am feeling faint. And I want to tell you while I can."

"The doctor said he was going to send you a trained nurse from Truro," said the girl; "perhaps she can help you better than I."

"No, no, I want no nurse; I only want you; you can do better for me than any nurse. Besides, I shall be gone before she comes."

The girl pressed his hand convulsively, while her lips quivered; beyond this, however, she had maintained control over herself.

"Nancy, my dear," went on Felix, "you will be penniless when I am gone."

She did not speak, but she could not repress the shudder which passed over her.

"I am in debt, head over ears in debt," he continued. "The house, the farm, the stock, the crops are all mortgaged for every penny they'll bring. I know it was wrong, but I did it for your sake, my dear."

"Who are they mortgaged to?" She asked the question mechanically, and she had no interest in his reply. What did it matter?

"To Jack Beel," he replied. "You know him. Fifty years ago he cleaned out my stables, groomed my horses; but he had the money-making instinct, and he's made money. Clever beggar, cleyer beggar. He got on little by little. He took parish contracts for hauling stones to put on the roads; then he bought a stone crusher. After that he got an interest in a cement factory. He lived on nothing, but he saved money. Now he's worth his thousands. It was a bitter pill to swallow, but I swallowed it. He offered to lend me money, and I, hoping for better days, accepted it. Then I speculated, and lost—lost everything. The house, the farm will all have to be sold; everything will have to be sold to pay him. My dear, there'll be nothing left. I didn't tell you before, I couldn't; besides, I kept hoping and hoping."

A spasm of pain shot across Felix Trevanion's face and he gasped for breath.

"Don't worry, Dad," cried the girl; "I shall be all right. Besides, you will soon be better." She felt that her words were not true, but they escaped her in spite of herself.

"The worry has been slowly killing me," continued the old man. "I knew it all the time, only I wouldn't give in. I wouldn't give in now if I had a ha'porth of life in me."

"It'll be all right," she still tried to cheer him; "we will keep Trevanion somehow."

"Will you?" he cried excitedly. "Will you? Say it again!"

"Of course we will," she assented, feeling all the time that her words were meaningless. They escaped her lips almost involuntarily, so great was her desire to bring peace to her father's heart.

"Promise me, Nancy!" he said, clutching her hand feverishly. "Promise me, my dear. It's the Trevanions' house; it's the Trevanions' land; it's all that's left to us of the far past. Don't let it go out of the family, my dear. You are young, you are clever, you are beautiful. It'll have to be sold; but buy it back, buy it back for the family's sake!"

"Yes, I will."

"You promise?"

"Yes, I promise."

He was silent for a few seconds, and although a deep sigh passed his lips there was a light of joy in his eyes.

"No, no, don't bother," he said presently. "It doesn't matter. Besides, you can't do it. I tried and failed, how then can you do it? Besides, it's all as empty as air. What do name and family matter? it's what we *are* that matters, not what we are called. All the same, it's interwoven into every fibre of my being; it goes so far back. Century after century the Trevanions lived at Trevanio Court, and I can't help wanting the Trevanions to live here still; but don't trouble, my dear, don't trouble."

"But I will do it, Dad; I will do it!" and again she noted the light which flashed into his eyes as she uttered the words.

"But everybody must be paid," and there was a stern note in his voice. "No one must ever say that a Trevanion owed anyone anything."

"Every one *shall* be paid!" cried the girl.

Again he closed his eyes and his lips quivered.

"God forgive me if I have done wrong," she heard him murmur, "but I *do* love the old place; it's the home of my people," and then he lapsed into silence.

Minutes passed but still she sat holding his hand, and looking at him with infinite tenderness. Presently he spoke again.

"It seems such a little thing; so empty, so worthless; but you have made me happy. Thank you, my dear, thank you; you *have* made me happy. I know it's wrong, but I don't feel I could die happy if I thought the old home would remain in other hands. Will you leave me a little now, dear? I am very tired and—and I want to rest."

A minute later he was sleeping as peacefully as a child.

Before the sun went down that day old Felix Trevanion was dead. He had died peacefully, almost happily. The last look of intelligence which was seen in his eyes was when he had gazed at Nancy; the last words he had uttered were almost indistinguishable; but Nancy had heard them. "My little maid, my little maid," he had whispered, "she's all that's left; but she'll do it."

Hours earlier he had tried again to explain his position and his desires to her, but beyond telling her where the papers appertaining to Trevanion Court were to be found, he had added little to what had passed between them in the morning.

During the days which intervened between her father's death and his funeral, Nancy had been like one in a dream; nothing revealed itself in clear outline. She knew that a great black shadow rested upon her life, because her father had been taken away from her, but everything else was blurred and confused.

When the funeral was over, however, the facts she had to face stood out clearly before her. Lawyer Hendy, who had been a lifelong friend of Felix, came to the house and read the will. It contained only a few words; everything he had to leave he left to Nancy. Trevanion Court, the two hundred acres of land which belonged to it, the livestock, the crops, everything was hers—after his debts were paid.

"Will anything be left after they *are* paid?" she asked the old lawyer wistfully.

Lawyer Hendy was silent for a few seconds, then he shook his head. "Not much, I am afraid," he said slowly. "Your father has evidently told you all."

"I think so," was the reply.

"It seems cruel to say so now that he has gone from us," remarked the old lawyer; "but he would take no notice of my warnings. I told him when he insisted on sending you to St. Andrews and to Cambridge that he couldn't afford it. I insisted when he bought a hunter for you that he was in reality robbing you; but nothing would alter him. He declared that you, as a Trevanion, perhaps the last of the family, must be brought up in a way befitting your name. Doubtless he was wrong, but he did everything out of love for you, my dear. He scarcely spent a penny on himself; it was you all the time. You don't think hardly about him, do you?"

"Hardly about him? No! no!" and her voice quivered as she hastily wiped her tears away.

"He was a very proud man," went on the lawyer, "and although he was kind and courteous to all, he could never forget that he was a Trevanion. I think the thought obsessed him, especially during the latter years of his life. That was why, although perhaps he ought not to have done it, he kept old Adam Trebilcock here as butler. In the ordinary way he could not afford to keep him, but he insisted. He was a Trevanion. A juster man never lived, a more honourable man never breathed, and yet from this standpoint he was unjust and dishonourable. Instead of leaving you with a fair competence I am afraid he has left you penniless. It was all his family pride."

"There will be enough to pay every one, won't there?" asked the girl anxiously.

"Yes," replied the lawyer; "I think every one can be paid to the last shilling. There may be a few pounds left over, but very few."

"That's all I care about," was the girl's reply.

"But he defeated his own ends," went on the lawyer. "This old place which he so much loved will have to go;

in his desire to keep Trevanion Court in the family he has made it impossible."

Nancy's eyes flashed, but she did not speak; she would not tell even the old lawyer what had passed between her and her father.

After Lawyer Hendy had left she turned eagerly to the papers of which her father had told her. Almost feverishly she made a list of the debts, and then swiftly calculated the possible amount of the assets. Yes, Lawyer Hendy was right; when everything saleable had been sold they would barely cover the liabilities. She, Nancy Trevanion, would have nothing. Her legacy, according to the world's standard of valuation, was absolutely nil.

But there was more than this. She had promised her father that although Trevanion Court and everything pertaining to it would have to be sold, she would get it back. It was this promise that helped him to die happy; it was this promise that brought a smile of contentment to his lips at the last.

And she would keep it.

How she was to do it she did not know; the chances of her getting enough money to buy back Trevanion Court, or to pay off the mortgage resting upon it, seemed as remote as the evening star. But she had promised, and she would keep her promise. She would keep it too in such a way that no shadow of dishonour should rest upon her name. She was a Trevanion, and she must be true to the Trevanion traditions.

All this may seem poor and little, and I may be alienating sympathy from Nancy in telling this part of her story. All the same, I would have my readers remember the atmosphere in which she had been reared, and her upbringing. Say what we will, but pride of race is a very real thing. Many who read this are proud that they are British. Because of this pride and because they wanted to be true to British integrity and British honour, hundreds of thousands gave their lives during the Great War. And, poor as it may seem, pride of family comes even

nearer to us than pride of country. Napoleon the Great once boastfully said, "I am my own ancestry." Nevertheless, when one can claim a name which has been honourably associated with great events in history for long centuries, it counts for much. More than this, when one belongs to a family which for long generations has lived in a certain house, and called it "home," he or she is influenced by thoughts and feelings which must ever be strange to those who have no such associations. Thus, although Nancy Trevanion's determination to keep Trevanion Court for the Trevanions because she was a Trevanion may seem poor, it was at the same time natural.

It was now early summer; and the country-side looked at its loveliest. Standing at the front door of her old home, a wide panorama of hill and dale presented itself to the girl's beauty-loving eyes. In the garden at her feet, although now neglected and weed-grown, her forbears had wandered. There they had played as children, there they had had their dreams of love. The portico under which she stood, with its long rows of granite pillars, was reminiscent of old family traditions. Every stone of the building which she called home told of the history of her race.

But it was no longer hers; it was the property of strangers. But she must get it back.

That was the real legacy her father had left her.

But how could she do it? Lawyer Hendy had told her less than an hour before that when everything was realized she would be practically penniless; she would not have a home in which to live. Not only the house but the furniture would have to be sold. She knew nothing of the ways of the world, she was only a little over twenty-one and had been at school and college most of her life. She had been brought up in a way supposed to be befitting her station. She had a smattering of Latin and Greek and was tolerably acquainted with two modern languages. She knew something of music, but not enough to be of any practical advantage to her. She was also

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regarded as especially good at sketching, but here again she saw no means of getting a living. Both at school and college she had studied chemistry, and whilst the subject appealed to her strongly she knew that it offered not even a means of getting a living, much less of obtaining a large sum of money. She thought of girls who, years before, she had known, who had become successful in literature. One especially had made more than a thousand pounds by a novel she had written, but she knew she was not gifted in this direction. What then could she do?

Suddenly a flush came to her face, and it seemed to her that a voice whispered in her ear.

Marry for money!

She knew she was beautiful, more than one had told her so. She knew too that in that very district young men were supposed to be in love with her. Why couldn't she make use of her beauty? Girls she had known had made what were called "brilliant matches." Why couldn't she? If she was charming, as many seemed to think she was, could she not fascinate some rich man, and thereby obtain her heart's desire?

For a moment the thought pleased her, tempted her. But she put it out of her mind; the very idea was loathsome. No, no; she could not sell herself in that way, even although it might seem easy. Every fibre of her being revolted against the thought.

A second later she was startled by the sound of strange voices, and looking down the drive she saw two men coming towards her. At first she could not recognize them, they appeared to be strangers to her; then she saw who they were. One of them, the older of the two, was Jack Beel, the man who had, long years before, been a stable boy there, but who now was the real owner of Trevanion Court.

CHAPTER III

THE BEELS

JACK BEEL was a hale, vigorous man of wellnigh seventy years of age. His every appearance pronounced his origin. Largely built and largely featured, he looked what he was, a rough, coarse man. And yet not altogether so. One could conceive him doing kind deeds, and there was a shrewd, kindly smile both on his lips and in his eyes. He wore a fringe of iron-grey beard beneath his chin, while his bushy eyebrows and his thick mat of coarse grey hair gave him an almost masculine appearance.

As he approached nearer the house he stopped and looked complacently around him. Doubtless he was thinking that to all intents and purposes, Trevanion Court, the outbuildings, and the two hundred acres of land were in reality all his.

By his side was another, a younger man. It was easy to guess the relationship between them; this younger man was old Jack's son, his pride and his darling. Jack had no social ambitions for himself; but he was ambitious for this son of his. From the day of his birth he had made up his mind that "Young Jack," as he was called in the neighbourhood, should be a gentleman.

Young Jack was in many respects a replica of his father. He was tall, broad shouldered, and strong. If wrestling held the same sway in Cornwall as it had two centuries before, one could have believed that Young Jack would have carried the champion's belt. Unlike his father, Young Jack spoke the King's English correctly, and although at times his Cornish accent became pronounced,

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especially when excited—indeed on occasions he even lapsed into the vernacular—he, on the whole, did credit to the schooling which his father had given him. He was now twenty-five years of age, and was Old Jack's chief man of affairs.

"Good evenin', Miss Nancy," he greeted the girl as he came up close to her.

Young Jack lifted his hat, as well as repeated his father's words.

Nancy felt sure why they had come. This old man was there to remind her that he was the owner of the house.

"Nice evenin'," went on Old Jack, looking complacently around him, "and those oul' trees do look purty, don't 'em?"

Nancy had difficulty in replying; nevertheless, she greeted the couple politely, after which both of them remained awkwardly silent for a few seconds.

"You've 'ad a nice day for the funeral," ventured the old man, again breaking the silence. "I was there myself, but I dedn' like spaikin' to 'ee then." 'Twud'dn seem fitty like."

Nancy almost shuddered, but she repressed every sign of her feeling.

"Now 'tes ovver, 'owever, we thought we'd come up and 'ave a talk weth 'ee. Nothin' like doin' things 't'wance, I'd' say."

"Won't you come into the house?" asked Nancy.

"Doan't care ef we do," was Old Jack's response, as he followed Nancy through the portico into the library.

Again Old Jack looked around appraisingly; evidently he was not slow to note the worn, shabby furniture, and the general air of dilapidation.

"I shaan't maake a penny out of et," he whispered to his son significantly.

"Won't you sit down?" asked the girl.

"Might so well. 'Tes no dearer to set than to stand, I b'lieve." Whereupon each took a seat which Nancy

had indicated, while she waited for them to continue. An awkward silence of nearly a minute followed; it was evident that each of them was unaccustomed to such surroundings and felt ill at ease. Old Jack had rehearsed to his son before starting what he meant to say, and how he was going to say it, but something in the girl's presence caused him to hesitate. As he said to Young Jack afterwards, "he wasn't used to talking to hoity-toity maidens."

"I doan't want to be 'ard 'pon 'ee," he remarked presently.

"Why should you?" asked Nancy.

"Well, p'raps you'm right. Why shud I? Oal the saame, I b'lieve in plain spaikin', I do. I s'poase you'd know that I've got a mortgage on everything?"

Nancy was silent.

"I 'ave any'ow. Your father awed me a lot of money 'ee ded, and as fur as I can see I shall never see it back agen."

"I beg your pardon," replied the girl, "Mr. Hendy has been here this afternoon and he told me there would be enough to pay every one."

"Well, we sh'll see," remarked Old Jack. "As I said, I don't want to be 'ard upon 'ee; but I must see to my rights. That's why I 'ave come up 'ere this evenin'."

Another awkward silence fell between them; again Old Jack looked round him, while Young Jack shuffled uneasily in his chair.

"Not but what I 'ope we may come to a friendly arrangement like. I be all for paice and quietness, I be; and ef you be reasonable things may not turn out so bad after all."

Nancy looked at the old man curiously, almost hopefully. She wondered what was in his mind.

"Your father dedn' trait 'ee fair," burst out Old Jack presently.

"I beg your pardon."

"Your father dedn' trait 'ee fair," he repeated, "What business 'ad 'ee to send you off to a fine school and to

college? 'Ee 'adn' got the money to do et. That ed'n right nor fair to man nor baist. I'd 'ear that all the time you was to college you cost 'un four 'undred a 'ear. No farm like this could stand that. Besides, what be 'ee fit for now? Can 'ee milk cows, make butter, and things like that?"

"I am afraid I can't," replied Nancy.

"Well, there tes. A farmer's daughter shud be brought up as a farmer's daughter; for tha's all your father was in spite of 'is fine ways and 'igh notions. But I've see'd it comin' for 'ears, I 'ave."

Another silence.

"I s'pose you'd know that I was wance stable-boy 'ere?—I was any'ow. That was back in your grand-father's days. 'Ee was like your father, and 'ad the same 'igh notions. Your father was brought up like a young squire, and 'ee traited me as ef I was so much dirt. Well, what happened? There was more'n two 'undred acres belonging to this 'ouse then; more'n four, more'n five; but 'ee lived beyond 'is means, and 'ad to sell a lot of land to pay 'is debts. That's what your family 'ave always bin doin'. Well, now, look where everything es now. More'n fifty 'ear agone I was o'ly stable-boy 'ere while your father was a young squire, so to spaik; while now, I do own everything, as you may say, while your father 'as gone and died and left you 'ardly a shillin' to your name. I bain't saying these things to 'urt 'ee, mind that; I am only tellin' 'ee that you may see 'ow things do stand. I've made money and your family 'ave spent it; that's where the difference es."

Every word wounded the girl like poisoned arrows, but she did not speak.

"But there, 'tes as 'tes," went on Old Jack. "The poor people 'ave gone up and the big people 'ave come down. Time was when the Trevanions was maaster of me, and now I'm maaster of they, so to spaik. I dedn' ask for no pity when I was down, and you mustn' ask for no pity now you be down."

"I don't know why you are saying all this to me," replied Nancy. "I am asking nothing from you, and don't intend to. From what I can gather you have a mortgage on everything; well, you must take everything; that's all."

"I be saying this for your good, my dear. I've bin wantin' to shaw 'ee 'ow things be as they be. I've saved money, I 'ave, but 'ow ded I do et? By bein' a savin' man. I've worked 'ard too, iss I 'ave. Night and day I slaved for 'ears, and never spent a penny 'pon myself. And I've lived near too. I dedn' 'ave no butler, nor no grand things round me. Near! Why, for 'ears I lived on the smell of a pilchard, as you may say. People called me main, but what ded I care 'bout that? I was able to lend your father money, and now I've got Trevanion Court."

"Is that all you have to say?" asked Nancy; "because if it is I needn't trouble you to stay any longer."

"Tedn' no trouble, my dear. Besides, as the plaace do belong to me, so to spaik, I want to look round and chat 'ovver things."

"I beg your pardon," replied Nancy, "but technically speaking Trevanion Court does not belong to you yet. I presume there will be a sale, and everything will be sold for what it will bring. After the sale is over you will be paid."

"There now, there now," interposed Old Jack in a conciliatory tone of voice; "don't 'ee take it like that. I've come to 'ee in a proper spirit, my dear, and I've brought my boy weth me. Besides, there ed'n' no faison for a sale as far as I can see, ef you will fall in with my notion."

"No reason for a sale?" repeated Nancy.

"Why shud there be? Come to that I s'pose 'twould be a bitter pill for 'ee to give up everything. You would like to stay 'ere and be missus jest as you always 'ave bin, wudden 'ee?"

"Of course I would, but that's impossible."

"Don't 'ee be so sure of that, my dear," remarked Old

Jack meaningly. "Come now, I've a notion, and from what 'ee do tell me my boy 'ave too."

Nancy gave Young Jack a quick glance and saw that he had become a fiery red, and looked more ill at ease than ever.

"Come now, spaik up, you booba," and Old Jack looked meaningly at his son.

"I don't want to say anything that wouldn't please. Miss Nancy," stammered Young Jack.

"'Course you don't. Not that I do agree weth 'ee," he added. "I picked out Selina Nancarrow for 'ee; a fine strapping maid who is a good milker and a good butter maker, iss, and who don't mind working in a hayfield, or a harvest field ef 'tes needed. But there, you be gone silly 'bout this grand maid, and I've gived in to 'ee. I know you be willin' and ef she's willin', I be willin'. There now. Come to that, I don't know but that it'll please me in some ways."

"I am afraid I must ask you to speak more plainly," replied Nancy. "I don't understand."

"Don't 'ee? Then I'll maake 'ee understand. I be thinkin' of givin' Young Jack 'ere Trevanion Court as a dowry. There now. Iss, and I'll taake ovver the whole plaace as 'tes; 'ouse, furniture, farmstock, everything just as 'tes. 'Ee's a fine chap too; never gived me a day's trouble in 'is life, and what 'ee don't know 'bout farmin' edn' worth knowin'. Well, 'ee've took to 'ee; took to 'ee somethin' terble. 'Ee waant even sniff at another maid; 'ee've took to you. Now, you marry Jack and we'll make everything comfortable. Well, what do 'ee say? That's plain edn' et?"

Nancy was so astonished that for a few seconds she could not speak. Such a thing had never entered her mind, and the proposal seemed so grotesque that she had difficulty in refraining from laughter.

"Iss, I do know I be offerin' a big thing," went on Old Jack. "I be worth thirty thousand pound I be, ef I be worth a penny, and everything 'll come to my boy. 'Ee can

'ave 'is pick of the maidens too ; maidens that'll 'ave a fortin, while you be as poor as a coot. And 'ee've took to 'ee too, took to 'ee terble, ain't 'ee, Jack ? Spaik up, you booba."

Young Jack found his tongue at last ; he took two steps nearer Nancy and then poured out his soul.

" Miss Nancy," he cried, " I didn't think father would speak to you like this ; I didn't mean him to ; but—but I'd do anything for you, Miss Nancy. I'd give you my heart's blood if it would do you any good, and I do hope you will do what father wishes."

In spite of herself Nancy could not help being impressed by the young fellow's sincerity. Every word he said rang true, and although he was in many respects a replica of his father, education and different associations had done something for him.

" Say you will ! say you will ! " pleaded the young man eagerly, " and there is nothing I won't do for you."

Nancy found it difficult to reply. She did not want to hurt the young fellow's feelings, and yet the thought of giving him the answer he wanted to hear, was so utterly alien to her feelings that the right words would not come.

" I am afraid I can't give you the answer you want," she said. " You see, my mind is full of trouble, and during these last few days I haven't been able to think clearly."

" Naatr'lly, naatr'lly," broke in Old Jack, " and there is plenty of time. No 'urry, no 'urry. My boy can wait a few days before we settle it up, can't 'ee, my son ? "

" I'd wait days, months, years ! " was Young Jack's ardent reply. " But you will give me a little hope, won't you, Miss Nancy ? "

" I can promise nothing," replied the girl, " it wouldn't be fair. Besides, when Trevanion Court is sold——"

" But it *need'n* be sold, I tell 'ee," interposed Old Jack. " Ef you'll be rais'nable——"

" When Trevanion Court is sold," persisted Nancy, " it is my intention to attach a condition to it."

" What condition ? " asked the old man excitedly.

Her words suggested a bargain, and as a consequence appealed to him strongly.

"The condition is that I shall have the option of buying it back within a number of years—say five."

"You buy back Trevanion Court!" exclaimed Old Jack. "Why, who ever 'eerd tell of such madness? What magum will 'ee be tellin' of next? Why, I've advanced eight thousand pounds 'pon the plaace I 'ave, and you bain't worth a penny-piece. Where can you get so much money?"

"That rather looks like my business, doesn't it?" replied Nancy. "Anyhow, I shall insist upon it as one of the conditions of the sale."

"But the plaace is mine, *mine!*" persisted Old Jack.

"Not if I understand Lawyer Hendy," replied Nancy. "Possibly it will bring more than eight thousand pounds. In which case, after paying you your mortgage you will not have the slightest claim upon it."

"I will see about that," replied Old Jack boastfully. "I've got my fingers in this pie and I mean to keep 'em there. Why, who'd give so much for the plaace as I will? 'T'wouldn' pay nobody else like 't'would pay me. And I've promised it to my boy 'ere for a dowry. 'Tes as good 's 'is already, come to that. I'd mean for 'im to come aere to live d'rectly things be settled."

"But I don't want to turn you out, Miss Nancy, I want you to be here. I know how you love the place, and I'm sure it would break your heart to leave here. Couldn't you promise now, couldn't you? You love Trevanion Court, don't you? and you don't want to go away to a strange place."

In a way she couldn't explain, the young fellow's words almost overwhelmed her; it reminded her of what she and her father had said to each other three days before. The thought of leaving the old home seemed to her worse than death.

"Love it!" she cried, and tears started to her eyes as she spoke. "Love it! you can't have any idea how I

love it! It was built by our family; they lived in it generation after generation, and the thought of it going to strangers is——” She could not finish the sentence; sobs choked her voice.

“Then why should you leave it?” pleaded the young man. “You shall be mistress of it as you always have been, and I will do anything for you, Miss Nancy, anything.”

“Ess, but she shaan’t stay ’ere ef she waan’t marry ’ee, mind that!” cried Old Jack. “I be ’ant a fool ef you be.”

“Do say you will,” pleaded the young fellow again. “It would break my heart if—if——”

“But I shall insist on an option,” she interrupted.

“You’d mean by that that you wa’ant ’ave Jack?” asked the old man angrily.

“I mean what I said,” replied the girl.

“Option, option,” repeated Old Jack, musingly. “I be a business man I be, and I’d mean to buy this place.”

“You say you mean to have Trevanion Court?” cried Nancy.

“That’s what I’d say, and that’s what I’d main. No matter what anyone else do bid I’m going to bid ’igher. And when I do get it nobody shall ’ave et for less than ten thousand pound.”

“Good evening,” said the girl, “I am afraid I cannot talk any more now. Besides, you came here to look over the place, so don’t let me detain you. Go where you like,” she added; “you have my permission.”

“Your permission, eh? Go where I like, can I?” snorted Old Jack scornfully. “I should think I could! I should like to see anybody try to stop me. Come, my dear boy, laive ’as look round; the maid’ll be more sensible in a day or two.” Whereupon he led the way out of the house, while Nancy threw herself into a chair and sobbed as though her heart would break. She felt utterly desolate, utterly hopeless. She had lost her father, while old Jack Beel’s presence had reminded her, if reminder were needed, that she had lost her old home.

Ten thousand pounds in five years. The thought of it seemed too impossible for words. Besides, that would not be all. What would be the use of possessing such a place if she didn't have the means of keeping it as it ought to be kept? How could she, a girl not yet twenty-two years of age, obtain such a large amount of money?

Presently she started up and began to wander from room to room. She noted the perfect proportions of each apartment, reflected on the beauty of the view from every window. And it was the home of her people, the home of the Trevanions. Through the long centuries the Trevanions had lived there, and now she, the last of her race, had to leave it.

Then she remembered her promise to her father; remembered the light in his eyes as she had made it. It was true he had told her that she must give up thinking of it, and yet the joy it gave him made it binding to her.

Yes, and she would too! How, she did not know; of what steps she should take she was utterly ignorant; but she would do it!

She found her way to the portico again and looked out on the landscape. The sun was sinking, and the whole western sky was lit up with golden glory. Birds were twittering on a thousand branches, flowers were blooming everywhere. She drew a deep breath and her hands clenched themselves. "Yes, I'll do it," she said again and again.

"Look 'ere, my dear," and again she heard Old Jack's voice, and saw him standing close beside her. "My boy and I 'ave been talkin' things ovver together like. Now mind, I've no sympathy with what 'ee'd say, all the same I'd do a bra' deal for un. 'Ee do say that praps you, being a Trevanion wouldn't like to change your name to Beel. Not that Beel edn't a good name. 'T'es a good name; but there 'tes. You be a Trevanion and I be a Beel. Well, my boy 'ave bin saying to me that ef you'll marry 'im 'ee'll take steps to change is name from Beel to Trevanion, so that— Well, you can see, caan't

'ee? I bean't goin' to say no more now, but think it ovver."

"Thank you, Mr. Beel," replied Nancy.

"And you 'll think it ovver, waan't 'ee? Not but what such a thing do go against the grain weth me. What be fancy names; what be ould families? Nothin'. I told my boy so only a few minutes ago. There's young John Trefry, 'eeve got an old name. 'Ee'd' belong to a family nearly as old as yours. 'Is father was poor and proud afore'n; but what ded it amount to? Young John Trefry for all 'is aristocratic family do work in a 'lectrical factory for three pound a week. That's all 'is old name 'ave done for un. But there, I told my boy I'd tell'ee and I've told 'ee. Good night."

"Good night," replied Nancy and watched the couple until they were out of sight. They were barely gone, however, before she heard other footsteps, and turning she saw the very man of whom Old Jack had been speaking, Young John Trefry, who had long worshipped Nancy from afar, was now making his way towards the house.

CHAPTER IV

THE SALE

"**F**ORGIVE me for calling in this way, Nancy," begun the young man as he came close to her side. "I hope I am not intruding."

Nancy greeted him with a wan smile, although she felt desirous of being alone; his presence was welcome and the very tone of sympathy in his voice made her glad that he had come. As old Jack Beel had said, young John Trefry was a descendant of an impoverished race. Many years before the Trefrys, like the Trevanions, had been well-known people in the county. There had been an Admiral Trefry in the days of the Armada, and the family had held a high place in the estimation of the county ever since. But those days had gone, especially for John's branch of the family, and this young man in particular was little more than a clerk in an electrical engineering works.

John Trefry had neither a striking appearance, nor was he in any way especially clever; at least this was the general opinion concerning him. As a boy he had gone to Probus Grammar School, and although he was not regarded as clever, his career there had been quite respectable. He had shown a great aptitude for electrical engineering, and thus on leaving the school he had secured a post in a local engineering works. Not that there seemed any great prospects for him; the most that he could expect there was some sort of under-managership which might be able to yield him bread and cheese, but very little more.

John had for years been in love with Nancy, but had

never dared to express himself. It was true old Felix Trevanion had treated him with more courtesy than perhaps anyone else in the district ; but the thought of him as a lover for his daughter had never entered his mind. If he had dared to mention such a thing, the old man would have shown him the door. Even although he was penniless himself, he had the conviction that Nancy, if ever she married, must marry some one worthy of her race and her name. Owing to this the young fellow had for years worshipped Nancy in silence, and fondly hoped that some *Deus ex machina* would make it possible for the dream of his life to be fulfilled. But he dared not speak to her of such a thing. The girl thought of him in a friendly way, and his evident sympathy at this moment was gladly welcomed.

"I am afraid I ought not to have come," stammered John, "but somehow I—I couldn't help it."

"It was very kind of you to think of me, John," was the girl's reply. "As you see, I am alone."

"Yes, I was afraid lest——"

"Lest what ?" asked the girl.

"I thought a lot of people might be here."

"What people ?" You see, I have no friends now. Old Jack Beel and his son have just been here. They came to remind me that everything was theirs."

John Trefry was silent at this ; he knew, as every one else knew, that Old Jack held a mortgage on Trevanion Court, and boasted that everything would be his.

"The old rascal," he exclaimed at length. "I—I feel like murdering him."

"Why should you ?" asked the girl.

"To come on the day of your father's funeral and—— and—— It's just abominable."

"He says he's going to give Trevanion Court to Young Jack," Nancy informed him.

"What a shame ! And he'll live here, I suppose ?"

"I suppose so," and the girl gave an involuntary shudder.

John Trefry remained silent a few minutes and then he burst out.

"And what will you do, Nancy?"

Nancy did not reply to this for a few seconds. Even in spite of her promise to her father, no definite plans had formulated themselves in her mind. For that matter, in spite of what she had learnt during the last few days, nothing was real to her.

"I suppose I ought to have been prepared for it," she went on presently, "but my father never took me into his confidence, and I, being away at Cambridge most of the time, thought that all was well. Besides, I believed that father would live for many years; that was why—Oh, but I mustn't bother you."

"But I want to help you," pleaded John. "I am afraid I can't do much, but if there is anything I *can* do, I will gladly do it. You know that, don't you?"

"You see, I have no one to whom I can turn," said the girl, looking away into the distance. "Father had very few friends round here; he didn't want any, he said. Of course, there was Lawyer Hendy, but he lives at Truro, and—and I have no one. You see, here I am even on the day of my father's funeral without a home. No, I am not, though; both Old Jack and Young Jack told me the conditions on which I can stay here—if I like," and she laughed bitterly.

"But you said——" began John in a tone of astonishment.

"Yes, I know," Nancy interrupted him. "If I weren't so horribly bewildered, I believe I could enjoy it as a good joke."

John Trefry caught her meaning. Like others, he had heard of Young Jack's infatuation, and guessed what had happened.

"You don't mean that he had the impertinence to think of such a thing as that?" he cried. "Why, the very thought of it is horrible!"

"Why should it be?" asked Nancy a little bitterly. "He owns practically everything, and——"

"But you mustn't, you mustn't!" cried John eagerly; "it would be sacrilege; it would be a *crime*! Oh, I wish I could help you. What are you going to do?" he concluded.

"What is there I *can* do?" she asked.

"Not that, not that—anything but that! Tell me you won't. Look here, Nancy, I have saved a few pounds, nearly two hundred in fact, and——"

"Don't, John," she interrupted; "it's very kind of you, but I can't bear it. Besides, there is no need."

"But tell me you won't listen to Jack Beel."

"I'd rather die," cried the girl; "all the same, I am going to stay here as long as I can."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that there is to be a sale of the house, of the furniture—of everything, and I am going to stay until it is all over. While the place is mine, even though it is only in name, I am going to make the most of it."

"And I agree with you," cried the young man eagerly.

"But then, Nancy, what are you going to do then?"

A far-away look came into the girl's eyes. "Then," she replied slowly—"I don't know."

John Treffy drew a little nearer to her and seemed to be trying to decide on something desperate.

"Nancy," he cried, "I am afraid I am a poor helpless sort of fellow and shall never do very much in the world, but——"

"I think," the girl interrupted, "I shall accept the invitation of a girl I knew at school. She has for a long time been asking me to stay with her, and I have kept putting her off. I got a letter from her this morning begging me to visit her, and—I think I shall."

"How long will you stay?"

"I don't know. She has asked me for an indefinite period. Of course I shan't stay long, but long enough to give me time to think, to settle how I am going to do it."

"Do it?" repeated John. "Do what?"

Nancy did not answer him; the promise she had made

to her father seemed too sacred to discuss even with the best friend she had in the district. She wanted to keep her plans and hopes a secret.

"Do what?" he repeated anxiously.

"Oh nothing, John; nothing you would be interested in."

"I am interested in everything that concerns you, Nancy. . . . If I only dared! but I am so beastly poor and helpless." He hesitated a few seconds and then went on: "Nancy, if ever you want money, if ever you need a friend, you will come to me, won't you?"

"Yes, I will," she replied frankly.

"And—and Nancy, if ever—if ever——" He stammered painfully and then broke down. He wanted to tell her he loved her; wanted to ask her to allow him to provide her a home; but his sense of honour prevented him. He realized that although old Felix Trevanion had been living on the verge of bankruptcy for years, Nancy had been brought up amid circumstances that were utterly different from those by which he could surround her. Besides, how could she care anything about him? He had always been regarded as a dreamy, unpractical fellow who would never be a success, according to the world's standard of success.

And so the declaration which hung upon his lips was left unmade, and when he left her a few minutes later it was only with his repeated assurance that if ever he could render her a service that service would be more than gladly given.

The next week there were announcements made throughout the whole district that the house and farm known as Trevanion Court would be sold at the Black Bull Hotel in the town of Tolgarrick on Wednesday, the 15th of June, while another sale would be held at the house itself on Thursday the following day. On the latter occasion not only the furniture of Trevanion Court was to be disposed of, but all the live stock as well as all the farming implements.

It gave Nancy pain untold to see these announcements posted throughout the neighbourhood, but she bore it grimly, at the same time determining to be present at the sale. She felt that she owed this to her father. Why, she could not tell, but so it was. Painful as it was, she determined to see the last of everything. It seemed a part of the legacy her father had left to her, and she fondly hoped that by doing so some means might be suggested to her whereby she could fulfil the promise she had made. She knew that her hope was utterly foolish, utterly fantastic, and yet it was real to her, so real that it became like a religious feeling.

On the morning of the day she found her way to the sale room at the back of the Black Bull Hotel. She had told her intention to no one, and as a consequence her presence caused quite a little stir of excitement as she found her way into the room. Early as it was, quite a number of people had gathered, and at the time the sale commenced, at least a dozen prospective buyers were present, besides a number of people who had gathered out of curiosity. For the sale of such a place as Trevanion Court was not an ordinary event. Not only was the farm rich and much to be desired, but the house was historic. It was true it was not of a nature that would appeal to the rich parvenu, moreover it was realized that no "gentleman" could live there without first spending a considerable amount of money on it. Many of the rooms, finely proportioned as they were, had fallen into decay. The sanitation, such as it was, was of the most primitive nature, while the single bath which the house possessed would be scorned by the up-to-date person. Added to that, electric light and even gas was unknown; thus, as the farmers argued, no "gentleman would trouble about it."

Neither was it a convenient house as a farm-house. Many of them would have preferred an up-to-date building, no matter how ugly it might be, to what they called "this old ramshackle place."

"Wha's the use of all they fine carvin's and panelled rooms to a farmer?" said one to another. "Besides, see 'ow dark the plaace es. Ef I bought it, and 'ad the money, I would pull down they mullioned windas and put in good casement windas with big plate glass in their plaace. A farm-'ouse shudn' be built fer shaw, but fer usefulness."

In spite of this, however, many wanted it. The very fact of living at Trevanion Court would carry with it a certain position in the district, in spite of the fact that the place was not restored to its ancient glory. As a consequence, a great deal of excitement prevailed.

Nancy's presence added to the excitement. She looked so young, so helpless, and yet so proud, that she appealed not only to the pity of those present, but to their sense of romance. Why had she come? Anyone would have thought she would have preferred to escape the ordeal through which she was passing; for they knew it was an ordeal. She was a Trevanion, possibly the last of her race; and thus, for her to see the home of her fathers sold must cause her untold pain.

Presently the auctioneer entered by a door near the platform, followed by Lawyer Hendy and others less important. No sooner did Lawyer Hendy see Nancy than he made his way to her side.

"Why have you come here, Nancy?"

"Can't you guess?" asked the girl. "Can't you realize that loving the place as I do, I felt I must be here? Besides, my father is here, I am sure he is."

"At any rate, come and sit by me," urged the Lawyer, as two rough-looking men came and took seats beside her. Whereupon he led her to the little raised dais and brought her a chair.

Seated here she had to face the whole gathering and there was a murmuring almost like applause, as she looked towards them.

Both Old Jack and Young Jack Beel, who, as may be imagined occupied a prominent place in the assembly, were present. Before going into the sale room the former

had spoken loudly of the mortgage he held, and of his intention to hold fast to the property. This however did not deter several other wealthy farmers from determining to bid a high figure. Trevanion Court was a place in a thousand.

"Wha's that maid doin' 'ere, I wonder?" whispered Old Jack to his son.

Young Jack did not reply, but looked toward Nancy with wistful eyes, and vowed that in one way or another he would possess not only Trevanion Court but the proud girl who lived there.

The auctioneer made some facetious, and what he intended to be humorous remarks on the purpose for which they had met. Afterwards he spoke of the house as the home of a noble family, whose name went far back into the history of the nation. He enlarged on the desirability of possessing it, of the richness of the land and the value of the property. After this, the conditions of the sale were read. Most of them were common to sales of that nature, but presently a startled exclamation was heard throughout the room and a look of wonder came to the eyes of many.

"I must add to the other conditions," announced the auctioneer, "two of a special nature. They are as follows: First, that the vendor insists on the right to buy back, within the term of five years from this date, the house and land appertaining thereto for the sum of ten thousand pounds. I mention this," he remarked, "because I want it to be clearly understood that this is not an absolute sale of the freehold. It is an unusual condition, but the vendor insists on it. This, I am given to understand, is perfectly in order," and he turned to Lawyer Hendy as if for confirmation.

The old lawyer nodded his head gravely, while many eyes were again turned toward Nancy.

"Not much fear that the option'll be took up, I fancy," Old Jack Beel was heard to say to a neighbouring farmer.

"The second condition," went on the auctioneer, "is that the purchaser shall not sell, or allow to be removed any of the panelling, any of the old oak, any doors, or anything of whatsoever nature, during the said five years, but that everything shall be allowed to remain intact as it is to-day. If at the end of the said five years, however, the option referred to in the other condition is not taken up, then the purchaser shall have whole and absolute right to do what he thinks fit with the property." He enlarged on this and read a carefully prepared statement which had evidently been drawn up by the old lawyer.

Again Old Jack Beel was heard to laugh. "I know oal 'bout that," he said aloud. "That do'ant main nothin'."

When at length the sale commenced Old Jack was the first to make an offer.

"Five thousand pound," he announced loudly.

"And five hundred," added a competitor.

After that bidding was brisk until the amount offered reached six thousand five hundred pounds. Then, bids came more slowly and rose by fifties instead of by hundreds. Still, the desire to possess Trevanion Court was so great that Old Jack was beginning to get anxious. He saw, too, that he had a serious competitor in the room—a man named Polkinghorn, who, years before, had gone to America, had returned home to Cornwall as he declared "to end his days there," and was reputed to be enormously rich. How much truth there was in this no one knew, but as time after time he had topped Old Jack's bidding it became evident that he seriously intended to be the purchaser.

"This," as Old Jack afterwards declared, "put me upon my mettle, and made me resolve that no Yank should get over me."

Thus, when Polkinghorn had bidden seven thousand one hundred pounds, the man who had at one time been a stable-boy at the Trevanion Court made an advance of four hundred pounds.

"Seven thousand five 'undred," he declared, at which there was a burst of cheering in the room.

"Go on, Jack," shouted some one; "you ain't got to the bottom of your stocking yet."

"Not ef I do double et," shouted the old man defiantly.

At this point the bidding entered on a new lease of life, and one hundred after another was added by each of the two competitors.

As may be imagined, Nancy became much excited, and she almost forgot her own pain in the interest that increased at every new bid.

She knew that at the advance of every hundred pounds she would become more and more removed from Old Jack's clutches. Since her father's funeral she and Lawyer Hendy had gone deeper into the liabilities with which her father had left her. Debts of which she knew nothing, and which probably old Felix Trevanion had forgotten, were made known to her, until she had become almost entirely hopeless. Thus if Trevanion Court only realized the sum which Lawyer Hendy had mentioned as the probable maximum, she would be utterly unable to carry out the further project which had been born in her mind. With every advancement in the bidding, therefore, after the sum which Lawyer Hendy had mentioned, her hopes passed into possibilities, and from possibilities to probabilities.

"Eight thousand pounds."

"Thank you, Mr. Polkinghorn. Eight thousand pounds for Trevanion Court and approximately two hundred acres of land as shown on the map," announced the auctioneer complacently. "Gentlemen, of course you have not come to the end of your bidding yet. As you know, the house is historic, and some of the land is the richest for miles around."

"What's the good of such a 'ouse to a farmer?" shouted some one.

"Ess, and there edn' two 'undred acres of agricultural land," volunteered another. "Several acres be woods, and all the north side of the plaace es cold."

"Eight thousand one 'undred," snarled Old Jack. "Now then, put that in yer pipe and smok et."

Evidently eight thousand pounds was the extent to which Mr. Polkinghorn was prepared to go, and shortly afterwards Old Jack became the purchaser at eight thousand one hundred pounds.

"I wish you joy over your bargain, Mr. Beel," Polkinghorn smiled at him when the sale was over.

"Do'ee?" snarled Old-Jack. "You made me pay dear for et, any'ow; but I'd 'ave 'ad et ef a cost me ten thousand."

"You've bin took in, Jack," said an old farmer who had known him from a boy. "Why, I wouldn't give much more'n two 'undred a 'ear for the plaace, and that's onnly the interest on four thousand."

"Ess," replied another, "and it'll taak'ee a thousand to put the out'ouses in repair."

"Besides, there is the option," urged another.

"Git away, you fool!" snorted the old man, "the option's worth nothin'. I should git ten thousand any'ow ef 'twas took up. Besides, where is that maid goin' to git ten thousand pound?"

"She's a clever maid, any'ow," remarked another. "And you ain't got the mineral rights."

"There ed'n no mineral 'pon the plaace," snarled Jack, who was evidently in a bad temper. "Now I've got et I'm goin' to keep et. In five years' time I'll be able to sell that panellin' for five thousand pound," and casting an angry glance toward Nancy, who stood talking to Lawyer Hendy, he made his way out of the room.

On the evening of the next day after a long conversation with the auctioneer, Nancy sat alone with Lawyer Hendy.

"It's been a hard day for you, my dear," remarked the old man kindly.

"It's been better than I dared to hope for," was the girl's reply. "Of course, it's all been very horrible, and I wonder my hair hasn't turned grey, but I feel better than I thought I should a week ago."

Lawyer Hendy looked at her inquiringly.

"If I'd been obliged to sell the old bed on which my

father died," and a sob came into Nancy's voice as she spoke, "and a lot of the other things which have belonged to us for generations, I believe I *should* have gone mad ; but I haven't, they are mine still ; *mine!*" and there was a kind of exultation in her voice.

"Yes, you have saved them," replied the Lawyer, who was anything but a sentimental man. "But what good will they be to you, my dear? You can't use them."

"No, I know ; but I've *got them!* They don't belong to strangers. I should feel like a woman selling her wedding ring if I'd had to part with them."

"You have to thank Polkinghorn for that," remarked the old lawyer grimly. "Old Jack Beel had made up his mind that the house and farm wouldn't fetch more than seven thousand pounds. That was the maximum of what I thought they would bring, too ; but the odd eleven hundred pounds has put you on velvet. Mind, I don't think you were wise to reserve those old things ; there were two furniture dealers there who would have paid a big price for them. In that case you would have had a good deal of money in hand ; as it is you have very little—only about three hundred pounds at the outside. You see, there were more debts than we had at first calculated upon. Your father couldn't have known the value of money at all. The way he squandered——"

"Please don't," interrupted Nancy, "I can't bear even the suggestion of anything wrong being said about him. Why, after all, I am a rich woman. I still have the things I longed to keep ; I have money in hand, and I have the right to buy back the old home within five years."

The lawyer smiled sadly. "Is that any use to you, my dear?" he asked.

"Perhaps not, but somehow it makes me glad. I feel as though I have still a right to the old place. It doesn't altogether belong to that horrible old man. Did you notice the look of gloating that came over his face when it was knocked down to him? Fancy him owning what has

belonged to my people for hundreds and hundreds of years!" Then carried away by her feelings, she cried out, "But I will buy it back! I *will*! And he can't remove the panelling and the other things either. I am glad I insisted on that."

"My poor child," said the old lawyer paternally, "do you realize what getting ten thousand pounds means? Do you realize that you've set yourself an impossible task? Of course, I understand your feeling, but hadn't you better give it up?"

"Never!" replied the girl. "Never!"

CHAPTER V

THE BRIGGS FAMILY

LESS than a month later Nancy was in Leeds. She had accepted the invitation of her old schoolfellow, Jessie Briggs, and was installed in a comfortable house on the outskirts of the metropolis of Yorkshire.

Jessie Briggs was a typical Yorkshire girl, comfortable, kind-hearted, shrewd, and generally contented. Her father, Elijah Briggs, was a manufacturer in a large way, and was generally considered to be a wealthy man. He owned more than one mill in Leeds, and was also an extensive dealer in wool. In his youth he had been poor, but possessing that grit and determination for which Yorkshire people are proverbial, and also being a shrewd business man, he had prospered greatly. Consequently, although being reared amidst humble surroundings, he was now the owner of a large comfortable house, and held a position of influence in this great woollen centre. Uneducated himself, he was quick to learn the advantages of education; moreover, being ambitious for his children, he had sent them to good schools. Indeed, Benjamin, commonly called Ben, his only son, had not only been sent to Harrow, but passed on to the University afterwards, where he obtained quite a respectable degree. Ben was now in partnership with his father, and was generally regarded by the match-making mothers in the district as a "good catch." He was twenty-five years of age, fairly good-looking, stood well with what is called "the best end" of the young men in the city, and unmarried. He had now been in business with his father for between three and four years, and prided himself upon knowing the woollen trade from A to Z. Ben

was a keen business man too, and was anxious, as he often told his father, "to strike out on new lines."

"We must march with the times, father," he urged. "People's tastes are constantly changing, and it's for us to study their tastes and be ready to supply them with what they want."

Mrs. Briggs, a motherly, comfortable Yorkshire woman, was anxious for Ben to marry and settle down.

"It's noan good for young men to 'ave so much brass as our Ben 'as to spend upon themselves," remarked that lady to her husband again and again. "Ben should get wed. Ther's Alice Lister that he could 'ave for the asking; and she's well off too, is Alice. Her father will gi'er thirty thousand pounds if 'e gi'es her a penny."

"But Ben cares nowt about her," urged Mr. Briggs.

"Nay, he seems to care nowt about any of 'em," was Mrs. Briggs's reply. "'E's like a bee that goes from flower to flower, and never settles on any of 'em."

Jessie was several years younger than her brother and had but lately returned from school. She had been Nancy's fag at St. Andrew's and had regarded her with something like awe. It was true the two had met but little of late years as Nancy had gone on from school to Cambridge, while Jessie had been in the lower forms. But now she had returned home her heart had turned towards her one-time idol again. That was why she was so insistent on Nancy coming to visit her.

"What sort of a lass is she?" asked Mrs. Briggs on the morning of the day on which Nancy was due to arrive.

"She's just lovely," replied Jessie enthusiastically. "She was the best lacrosse player in the school and had her full tails before she left."

"Tails? I don't see why lasses should wear tails."

"You don't understand, mother. It means the school colours."

"Oh, I know nowt about that," replied Mrs. Briggs. "What's she like?"

"She's awfully clever," replied Jessie.

"Clever what at?"

"All sorts of things. Clever at chemistry, and painting, and that sort of thing, and I suppose she did brilliantly at Cambridge."

"Ah, well," remarked Mrs. Briggs complacently, "I don't see that these things are any use to lasses. You say she's poor?"

"Yes," replied Jessie. "I suppose the Trevanions were great people in the West of England at one time, but they've lost everything. From what Nancy told me her father's place had to be sold to pay his debts, and now she'll have to work for her living."

"What, go in for a governess or something like that?"

"I rather think she is going to be a teacher," replied Jessie.

"What, in a county school?"

"Oh no, nothing like that. I dare say she could get a post as a teacher in a school like St. Andrew's."

"Well, there is no brass in that," remarked Mrs. Briggs with a sigh, who looked upon every girl as a prospective bride for Ben, and Yorkshire woman as she was, she could never consent for Ben to marry where there was no money. "Poor lass," she added, "she'll be very sad after losing her father, and she'll be very tired too. Fancy travelling all the way from Cornwall to Leeds in one day. She'll have had to make a rush for it in London."

This was true. Arriving in Paddington just before five o'clock, Nancy had to hurry to King's Cross in order to catch the train for Leeds. She was both sad and weary too, and although she was going to stay with an old school-fellow she felt utterly homeless and friendless. It was with an aching heart that she had left Trevanion Court that morning, and as she had stood by one of the pillars of the portico and looked out on the scene that had surrounded her for years, she felt as though her heart would break. Her leaving seemed the end of everything. Rising early in the morning she had gone from room to room, remembering all the time that they no longer belonged to

her. All of them were denuded of furniture, for the purchasers had taken away what they had bought the day after the sale. Many wondered at her staying so long, but Nancy had remained till the last day stipulated in the sale. It had been arranged that old Adam Trebilcock should stay as caretaker until Young Jack Beel took up his residence there, and the old man had somehow arranged for a room in which Nancy could sleep until her departure for Leeds.

"You will be glad to leave the place," remarked the old man sadly as he brought her breakfast that morning. "It seems to me, who have lived here man and boy all my life, just like a tomb. Why, I can remember when——"

"Please don't," cried the girl, dashing away the tears which filled her eyes; "I can't bear it."

"No, it's ter'ble for you, ter'ble," assented the old man. "And ter'ble for me too. I don't feel as though I shall live long now. Why, with the master and you gone I shall have nothing to live for."

"You mustn't say that, Adam," cried the girl. "You must be here in readiness for the time when I come back."

"When you come back, Miss Nancy?" queried Adam.

"Yes, when I come back. For I shall come back again, Adam. You know I have the option to buy the place within five years."

Old Adam sighed. He had of course heard about this option, and like every one else regarded it as worthless. How could his young mistress, however clever she might be, buy back Trevanion Court?

"You mustn't say anything about it to anyone," went on the girl; "but you must hold yourself in readiness for my coming."

"Yes, miss."

"You've saved up enough to live on, haven't you?"

"Yes, miss, and I will say this; whoever the master left unpaid he always paid me regular. People used to call him names for keeping me in the 'ouse, but I'm glad he did. He was a Trevanion, and the Trevanions have

always kept a butler. That was why, poor as he was, he always persisted in keeping me. And he was right too; there 'ad to be a manservant in a place like this, and I didn't cost him much. Oh, it'll be ter'ble when you're gone, Miss Nancy."

"Good-bye, old friend," she said when at length a conveyance came to take her to the station. "Yes, you must kiss me just as you did when I was a little girl; and mind, you must keep strong and well for me."

"God bless her," sobbed the old man as he watched the conveyance going down the drive. "A dearer little maid never lived. Oh, if it only could be as she says!"

The country-side was bathed in sunlight as the train passed through Cornwall, and as with tear-dimmed eyes she saw the green fields, and the fresh verdure of the woods she felt as though she were leaving her heart behind her. What she was going to do, what her future was going to be, she had no idea. She possessed three hundred pounds, but beyond that nothing. She had bidden good-bye to her old home, and now it seemed to her that she had nothing to live for.

After the train left Plymouth she fell to dreaming about what had just passed, of all that Trevanion Court meant to her, and what possibilities the future might hold. On the night before, Young Jack Beel had visited her and had pleaded with her to stay. Young Jack had become almost eloquent.

"Why go away, Miss Nancy?" he had said. "You can stay as long as you like; and oh, if you *could* only stay for good! I fair worship you, I do, and no other girl in the world has a place in my heart. I shall be a rich man one day too, and I'll give you whatever you ask for."

Nancy had been moved by the young fellow's sincerity, but no, she could not do that. Even to remain possessor of her old home she could not do that.

"But I am not going to give up hope," declared Young Jack on leaving her, "and I shall never marry anybody

else, mind that. Don't give me up, Miss Nancy, and remember that one little word will always bring me to you. Can't you give me a little hope?"

Nancy shook her head.

"No, I am not going to take that as final," he declared. "I shall hope on and on, and you must never forget that your place as mistress of Trevanion Court will always be ready for you."

She remembered her parting with John Trefry too. John had spoken no word of love; had not even hinted at such a thing; but he had reminded her of her promise to turn to him if she should ever need a friend. Whether she knew what was in his heart or not I do not pretend to say, but her lips quivered a little as she thought of the look in his eyes. Poor, dreamy, unpractical John! She knew that she would always have him for a friend, but her dream of buying Trevanion Court back could never be fulfilled through him.

Thus, it was, when late that night the train drew nearer and nearer to the smoke-begrimed woollen metropolis she was utterly sad and worn out. From the time the train had left Doncaster the country had become more and more depressing. The day which was so bright in Cornwall was dark and lowering here in this smoky country. Everything seemed coarse and rough too, while the towns and villages through which she passed looked hideous. She remembered years before hearing a Yorkshireman say that "brass canna' be addled wi'out a mite o' grime," and she knew the meaning of it now. Yorkshire had bought its wealth at the price of dirt and ugliness; the once beautiful countryside had been destroyed in order to make money. Huge black coal heaps everywhere abounded, while hundreds of mill chimneys belched out half-consumed coals.

"Ay, but I'm glad to see you!" was the greeting she heard when the train stopped at Leeds. "That's it, give me another kiss. Ay, but I *am* glad to see you!"

In spite of herself the greeting of her old school friend

cheered her heart, and in spite of her grim surroundings she felt she had come among friends.

"I am glad you are not in black," went on Jessie. "I always have the feeling that black clothes make people miserable even when they've naught to trouble them. Of course, I know what you are feeling," she added awkwardly.

"My father asked me not to," replied Nancy.

"Ay, that's right. Don't trouble about the luggage; Fletcher will see to that," whereupon she led the way to the station yard where a handsome Rolls-Royce car awaited them.

"I reckon this will be a bit different from Cornwall," remarked Jessie as they passed along Briggate and up Boar Lane; "still, 'tis a grand place is Leeds."

Although it was nearly ten o'clock daylight had not gone. They were now at the height of summer, and the days were at their longest.

At first Leeds felt altogether depressing to her. The air was smoke laden, and every building looked dark and forbidding. The people, too, looked utterly different from those in Cornwall. They appeared to her to be smaller of stature, and their pallor formed a strong contrast to the sunburnt faces common to the West. Still, they looked contented and were evidently prosperous. Every one looked well dressed, and an air of affluence prevailed on all hands.

This was Nancy's first experience of a large manufacturing town, and she looked around her eagerly. On the night before she had been sitting under the portico of Trevanion Court talking with John Trefry. There, everything was silent and restful, the air was pure and sweet, while scarcely a sound disturbed the silence of the night. Here all was bustle and noise; crowded trams were rushing in every direction, while the streets were thronged with multitudes of people. Picture palaces were ablaze with light; shouts of laughter were heard on every hand.

"Ay, it's a grand place is Leeds," repeated Jessie as the car swept along the crowded thoroughfares. "I wouldn't like to live anywhere else. See, one of the picture houses is closing. Ay, they've had a good crowd to-night. I expect you will be hungry," she added.

"I believe I am," Nancy admitted. "You told me that I was on no account to have dinner in the train, and——"

"Yes, mother insisted on that," broke in Jessie. "Ordinarily we have dinner at half-past seven, but she's put it off till ten to-night. Ben'll be home by then too."

"Ben?" said Nancy interrogatively.

"Ben is my brother. He's coming home from Scotland to-day. He's been there on business. Didn't I tell you about him?"

"I am sorry your mother's put off dinner because of me," Nancy said apologetically.

"That's all right, and mother never makes trouble of anything. There, we are getting near home now."

By this time they had left the busier parts of the city and had entered the region where larger houses abounded.

"It's nice and quiet out here in the country, isn't it?" asked Jessie. "Mother didn't like it when she came out here first; but she's getting used to it now."

"Do you call this country?" asked the Cornish girl.

"It is for these parts. Of course, when you get nearer Harrogate there are no houses at all, but all the way from here to Huddersfield it's one continuous town. You see, we are in the very centre of the woollen district."

A few minutes later the car passed through a huge gateway and swept up before a square, substantial, well-built house.

"Now look here," explained Jessie, "we are going to have a right good time; we are just going to enjoy ourselves. You will find father and mother a bit old-fashioned, but we are all real glad you've come, and you are going to stay with us, oh, I don't know how long! You said something about a week in your letter, but a week'll be gone before you've looked around. You'll see."

The door opened as she spoke and Nancy found herself in a brilliantly lit hall.

"Here we are, Mother," this to a comfortable-looking lady who greeted Nancy with great warmth.

"I'm noan going to call you Miss Trevanion," announced Mrs. Briggs, giving Nancy a hearty kiss. "You are Jessie's friend and I'm going to treat you as such. We are homely people, my dear, and mak' no fuss. Ay, and here's father. 'Lijah, this is Jessie's friend, Nancy Trevanion. We're rare and glad to see her, aren't we?"

"Ay, that we are," assented Mr. Briggs warmly.

He was a stoutly built rubicund-looking man, with a short, thick neck, and a happy-looking face.

"We Yorkshire people are homely folk, Miss Trevanion," he added, "and we mean what we say."

"Nay, father, you mustn't call her Miss Trevanion," broke in Jessie. "She's Nancy."

"Well, Nancy it shall be then. As I was saying, we Yorkshire people are homely folk, but we are all out for making people happy; aren't we, mother?"

"Ay, that we are."

"Now, Jessie," went on Elijah, "take Nancy up to her room; she'll want to wash and titivate herself up a bit and then we shall be ready for dinner. Ben's home," he added, "and will be ready by the time you are."

Nancy might have been living in a new world. Darkness had now come outside, but there was no darkness within the house. Every nook and corner was brilliantly lit, and the brightly coloured apartments of the house added to the general cheerfulness. A huge electrolier decorated with large pieces of crystal hung in the hall, while on the landing above lights shone everywhere. The bedroom into which Jessie led her gave the same impression. The furniture was large and rich, and heavy. The bedstead, the huge wardrobe, the dressing-table, the chairs, were all made of bright polished pollard oak, while huge mirrors abounded. These all reflected the bright electric lights in such a way that Nancy was almost blinded.

"Ay, I do hope you'll like us," said Jessie impulsively. "I am sure I shall," replied the girl. "The doubt is whether you will like me."

"Like you! My father is in love with you already. I could see it by the way he looked at you. If he didn't like you he would have looked glum and have scarcely spoken a word, while mother would have put 'on her company manners. I watched her when we came in. She looked at you for a minute as though she wasn't sure what you would be like; then she rushed to you and kissed you. From that time I knew all was right. As for father, he nearly always likes the people that mother does. Ay, but we shall have a rare good time."

Jessie spoke correctly, as was natural to a girl who had spent several years in one of the best schools in the country, but her Yorkshire upbringing remained with her, and in spite of everything there was a suggestion of the Yorkshire accent in her speech. Nancy liked it. From the first moment she had stepped out of the train in Leeds she had felt that, in spite of the grim surroundings and the smoke and the grime, she would love the people.

"There goes the dinner bell," cried Jessie as the sound of a gong reached their ears, "and we mustn't be late. If there is one thing father's strict about, it's punctuality."

A few minutes later they were in a huge dining-room which was even more brightly lit than the hall.

"Ay, here you are," shouted Elijah Briggs as Nancy entered; "and this," nodding to a young man by his side, "is our Ben. You don't know our Ben, do you, although you have heard tell on him? You may as well know it at once," and the Yorkshireman laughed heartily, "but he's a regular lady-killer, so look out."

"Come now, father," objected Ben, "that's not fair."

"Ay, but you are. Still, you might be worse. And here's mother, so we will not wait any longer. I suppose we must allow you two lasses to sit together to-night, but only for to-night." Ay, but I'm rare and hungry," and Elijah took his place at the head of the table.

The scene was altogether new to Nancy, while the atmosphere of rich abundance which everywhere prevailed almost made her afraid. She was simply overwhelmed by the signs of wealth which expressed themselves on every hand. The heavy oak furniture, the great dining table covered with costly china-ware, the huge shining sideboard which gleamed with silver, the soft carpet at her feet, the richly upholstered chairs, all shouted of wealth; everything proclaimed such a contrast to Trevanion Court that she could scarcely believe her eyes. She realized as never before the difference between the wealth of the great industrial centres of the North and the scrimping, grinding poverty in which her father had lived.

When Jessie Briggs said that she meant to give Nancy a good time she evidently meant it. Never in her life had the girl so much kindness shown to her, as during her stay at Woodroyd, which was the name of Mr. Briggs' house. Each member of the family seemed to vie with the other in showering kindness upon her, and as Jessie had prophesied, more than a week had passed away before she realized it.

Jessie, who was proud of her county, determined that Nancy should see its glories, and before long, partial as Nancy was to Cornwall, she could not help admitting that Yorkshire was a dangerous rival. It was true the manufacturing districts were grim and depressing, but once away from the smoke zone she was able to revel in wild moors, rich wooded landscapes, and fertile agricultural country. She found that Yorkshire was rich in interesting associations too. York Minster was simply a dream of delight, a storehouse of history, and a marvel of architectural glory. Such places too as Fountains Abbey and Bolton Abbey surpassed all her previous fancies. At any rate, Cornwall possessed nothing like this, and she ungrudgingly admitted it. Indeed, it was a wonder to her that within such a very few miles of the great manufacturing centres such places could be found.

The great Yorkshire moors too, which lay a few miles

from Whitby were a source of delight to her. Proud as she had always been of the Bodmin moors, she felt that the rolling splendour of those wild regions of this great county equalled, if not more than equalled, those of the Delectable Duchy.

She was not so impressed with Scarborough, which the Yorkshire people called "The Queen of the English Watering Places," and she declared to Jessie that the Yorkshire coast paled into insignificance before the wild grandeur of Mullion Cove and Kynance Cove.

"Why, this isn't sea at all," she declared as Jessie rhapsodized on the glory of the coast; "it's just dirty water. Your beaches are brown and muddy, while your cliffs are altogether uninteresting. Wait until you see the Newquay beach. Don't boast of your Yorkshire cliffs till you see Trevoze Head, Gurnard's Head, the Land's End, and Kynance Cove."

"Anyhow, Yorkshire's good enough for me," retorted Jessie; "it's the grandest county in the whole country. Why, Yorkshire is a country in itself, and you could put two or three Cornwalls inside it."

Much as Nancy admired Yorkshire, however, she could not help confessing that Lancashire was quite as fine. One morning they got up early and the chauffeur drove them to Windermere. Nancy had never seen the Lake Country before, and she was simply enchanted by its wondrous beauty.

"Not that I wouldn't rather have Cornwall," she exclaimed, "but I must confess that we have nothing like this."

Elijah Briggs saw to it that she should know something of the industrial life of these two great counties. He took her over two of his own mills and explained to her what the woollen trade meant to the life of the world. He also drove her to Oldham in Lancashire, one of the ugliest towns in England and perhaps one of the most prosperous. Here a friend of Elijah's lived, who owned several cotton mills. One of them simply overwhelmed

her. How many thousand looms were placed in the huge building, nor how many hundred hands were employed there, I dare not say. But it was a great centre of industry while the wealth represented there was almost incalculable. She learnt that this town, smoke grimed and ugly as it was, touched the uttermost parts of the world ; that this huge mill, situated in the heart of this sordid Lancashire town, had associations with America, both North and South, with Australasia, with Africa, with India, with China.

"By gum," exclaimed Elijah, "no wonder people used to say that what Manchester says to-day England says to-morrow. Why, the world is largely run from Lancashire and Yorkshire. You may talk about Cornwall as much as you like, but what is it ? It may be pretty in its own way, but even there we can give it points. As for the rest, it's nowt ; while Leeds has more people in it than all Cornwall put together. As for brass, I doubt if there is as much brass in the whole of the county as you can find in that one dirty town."

"Brass ?" repeated Nancy.

"Ay, brass," echoed the Yorkshireman. "For after all, you can't do wi'out it. We Northern people may be called money-grabbers, but it's what we are all after ; and it's in such places as this that you find it. What opening is there for a young man in Cornwall compared to the openings up this way ? Supposing our Ben had been born wi' you, what chances would he have ? But up here—— Why, I tell you, if things go on as they are promising, Ben will be worth a million by the time he's forty."

During their journey back to Leeds that evening, Nancy was very quiet. She had now been the guest of Elijah Briggs for three weeks, and although Jessie had insisted that she must not think of leaving them for months yet, she felt that she was in duty bound to bring her visit to an end. But where could she go ? What could she do ? She remembered the promise she had made to her father

on the day he died. How could she fulfil that promise? The more she had thought about it the more hopeless she had become.

But her talk with Elijah and the owners of the Oldham mills had suggested to her a way by which she might not only earn her own living, but perhaps——

Thus it was that during the whole of her journey back to Leeds she was silent and preoccupied. The great car rushed up hill and down dale without her knowing it, and when at length they reached "Woodroyd," she was like one who had awakened out of a deep dream.

"You will sing to us to-night, won't you, Nancy?" said Elijah Briggs to her, when, after dinner, they gathered in the huge apartment which he called the drawing-room.

"Would you mind if I didn't, Mr. Briggs?" she asked. "Would you mind talking instead?"

"I'll do anything you like," exclaimed the Yorkshireman, "but what do you want to talk about?"

"About earning my living," explained Nancy, "about my future. I must get to work—I must get to work quickly."

CHAPTER VI

NANCY'S HOPES

"NAY, nay," insisted Elijah Briggs, "we are noan going to listen to that kind of talk yet. Why, your visit here is only just commencing. You will have to stay another month before you even begin to *think* of leaving us. Isn't that so, mother?"

"Of course it's so," exclaimed Mrs. Briggs heartily. "We've fair took to you, Nancy, and we don't want you to leave us. Besides, we want to give you something in return for your kindness to our Jessie when she first went to St. Leonards to school. There she wur, only a little lass, who didn't know anyone, while you were one of the top girls. Ay, Jessie has told us all about it. She were as lonely as a pelican in the wilderness, but you mothered her and made her happy. Besides, we want you here for our own sakes. We are not tired of her, are we, Elijah?"

"Tired of her!" exclaimed the Yorkshireman. "Why, I never enjoyed having anyone in the house so much before. Now I am telling you: you mustn't *think* of leaving us yet."

Ben Briggs, who stood by the mantelpiece smoking a cigarette, did not speak a word, but he listened with eagerness to what was being said. Evidently Ben was more than ordinarily interested. As for Jessie, she silently moved to Nancy's side while her eyes became dim with tears.

"It's awfully good of you," Nancy managed to say at length, "and I shall never forget your kindness; but I must think of the future, Mr. Briggs."

"Time enough for that yet," and there was something like a note of anger in the Yorkshireman's voice.

"I am afraid you don't understand," insisted the girl. "Oh, please don't think I haven't been happy while I've been here. A month ago I thought I could never be happy again, but you have made me forget a lot of my troubles, and—and——"

"There, there, little lass," said the Yorkshireman kindly. "mony is the time we have watched you sitting alone, and we've understood. Of course, your heart's a bit heavy sometimes; it couldn't be otherwise; but you're among friends, lass; and although perhaps I shouldn't say it, there is no friends in the world like the Yorkshire people."

"And I want you to remain my friends," replied Nancy; "but you see, I must think of the future, and I must earn my own living. I am very poor," she added.

The Yorkshireman was silent at this; true to the Yorkshire character, he looked upon poverty as nothing ~~short~~ of a calamity, and felt it every one's doing to get "brass," as he called it.

"I have never talked much about myself, or my circumstances," went on the girl; "I felt I couldn't; but I am sure you will listen to me patiently and sympathetically."

"Ay, that we will."

"Perhaps, too, you can help me," added Nancy.

"Help thee, lass," he said, lapsing into broad Yorkshire. "I am noan in your line, but the name of Elijah Briggs stands for summat in this town, so perhaps——"

"You know something about me," broke in Nancy; "Jessie will have told you."

"Ay, she's told us a bit; but she's gone into no particulars like. And we've asked for none; we didn't think we'd a right. It was not our business to inquire into your affairs. Not that we didn't want to know; but we never thought of asking."

The Yorkshireman spoke roughly, and yet there was refinement in his every tone. Elijah Briggs had been a poor boy in Leeds and had made money rapidly; but his sudden wealth had not made him vulgar or purse-proud.

and although he might not shine in society he was a gentleman at heart.

"I want to tell you," went on Nancy, "and I am sure you will understand. Three months ago I hadn't a care in the world. I knew my father was not a rich man, but I had no idea that he was practically penniless. You see, we lived in a fine old house which had been in the family for hundreds of years. I never noticed how shabby and poverty-stricken everything was, I don't know that I thought much about it. You see, it was home, and in my foolish way I believed that I should be able to live there always. I was nearly twenty-one when I finished at Cambridge and my father never having talked to me about the future, and I never dreaming that he would die for many years, never gave such things a thought. People have said since that he wasn't just to me, and that he should have made plans for my future, but—but—"

She dashed the tears away from her eyes, and after a few seconds went on again.

"He died suddenly, and on the day it happened he told me that my old home was mortgaged for all it was worth, and that when everything was sold, and his debts were paid, I shouldn't have a penny."

"Poor lass, poor lass," murmured Elijah sympathetically.

"I suppose at one time," went on Nancy, as soon as she was able to command her voice again, "Trevanion Court was the centre of a big estate, but during, I don't know how many years, the lands were sold one piece after another until two hundred acres were left; that and the old house—so I had to sell everything. You see, every one had to be paid."

"Ay, I see that," replied the Yorkshireman musingly.

"Well, every one *has* been paid; paid to the last half-penny."

"And left you nothing, I suppose?"

"I have three hundred pounds," replied the girl.

"It's a shame," Nancy heard Mrs. Briggs say.

"Oh, I am quite wealthy," said the girl quickly; "I

have not only that money, but I've got health, and a fair education. But you see, I must earn my own living; my self-respect demands that. That's what I wanted to talk to you about."

"But there is no need to talk about it *now*," persisted Elijah.

"But I must," replied the girl. "It's three weeks now since I left home, and I feel I am wasting time. You see, my father left me a legacy."

"A legacy?" repeated the Yorkshireman uncomprehendingly.

"Not a legacy in the ordinary way," replied Nancy; "it's a legacy which means making money—making a large amount, and of course I must start at once. You see," she added, "I have to make it within a certain space of time. My three hundred pounds will soon go if I don't earn anything, and—and I'm eager to start."

"Have you thought of anything?" asked Elijah.

"It came to me to-day," replied the girl; "came to me all of a sudden as I was listening to you and Mr. Barraclough over at Oldham. I realized then that much of my education seemed useless."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I saw that a knowledge of Latin and Greek and history and a host of other things were all of no practical use to me. I saw that one might be a graduate of an old university and yet have no means of earning a living."

"Ay, I suppose so. Our Ben here took a degree, but I don't see it's any use to him in the woollen world. Yes, it is, though. He's been able to represent the firm better because he's been to Oxford, haven't you, Ben?"

Ben did not reply; he had been listening throughout the whole conversation without uttering a word.

"There were two things I was interested in at college," went on Nancy, "which I hope may be of use to me. For one thing, I am a very fair chemist. It may seem a very strange thing for a girl to boast about, but I am. One of my professors in Cambridge told me I had quite

a *flair* for it. For another thing, and this did not come to me through college at all, was this: I think I have a good eye for colours, and I have a gift for sketching."

"Ay, that you have, Nancy," broke in Jessie. "You always had. Everybody admired your pictures when you were at St. Andrew's."

Elijah Briggs shook his head. "Pictures," he said disdainfully; "there is nowt in pictures. There's lots of these artist chaps can't scarcely make a bare crust. If you think you can earn your living by painting pictures, my lass, I am afraid you will be disappointed."

"I am not thinking of pictures in the ordinary way," replied Nancy, "but—but of other things. You remember that one of the mills we went through to-day was a linen factory, they manufactured tapestries, cretonnes, window-curtain materials, chintzes, and that kind of thing. I couldn't help thinking how poor and vulgar some of the patterns were, and yet Mr. Greenwood told us that he paid his designer hundreds a year for inventing them. You see, a change has come over people's tastes in the matter of house decoration; things that used to be loved are loved no more, and the designs which used to appeal to people appeal to them no longer. I don't know much about business, but I suppose Liberty's of London have grown to be a great firm simply because they have been able to understand the tastes of the age, and have produced artistic things."

"What did I tell you, father?" burst in Ben Briggs at this juncture. "You know we never got in with the big places in London because our designs were so poor. You know when I went to that big carpet place in Knightsbridge, the buyers laughed at the designs of our new carpets; laughed at them. You insisted that everything depended upon quality, and I told you that although you couldn't sell things without quality, ugliness had no market. Why, who buys the old staring colours now? And yet you persisted in keeping on old Pilkins, who has no more colour sense than a cow."

"Ay, but I couldn't sack him!" cried Elijah. "Why, we were boys together, and I have brought him up with me from t' bottom. I couldn't leave him to starve, could I?"

"It would have paid us better to have pensioned him off," cried Ben. "If we had we could have been on the look out for a good designer, and then our goods would'n't be a drug in the market."

The Yorkshireman was silent, evidently Ben's words had made him thoughtful.

"And do you think you could do something in this way?" he asked presently.

"I have wondered," responded the girl. "I know what I like, and one or two rather big artists have told me that I have quite a gift for sketching. Of course, I may be talking utter nonsense, but I couldn't help feeling that I could think of things far more beautiful than ~~Isa~~ at Mr. Barraclough's mill to-day."

Again silence fell upon the little company. Ben went back to the mantelpiece again and lit another cigarette, Mrs. Briggs shook her head despondently, while Mr. Briggs was evidently in deep thought.

"And do you think you could get a living at that, Nancy?" he asked at length.

"I could try, anyhow," responded the girl. "I have been thinking it over carefully and I am sure I could live two years on my three hundred pounds; meanwhile——"

"Ah, meanwhile," broke in Mr. Briggs. "My little lass, the carpet end of our business has not been successful, I'll own it hasn't; Ben here has given one reason, and I've given another; but do you know that designing doesn't come to one in a day? It needs a lot of training for."

"Does it?" asked Nancy. "Isn't it a matter of feeling, and instinct, and intuition?"

"And you've got it, Nancy, I am sure you have!" cried Jessie with worshipping eyes. "And it's just splendid too. You can live here while you make your designs, and I am sure we can manage it, can't we, Dad? You must."

manage it! Why, there are lots of rooms at the top of the house that are never used, and we will fit up one for Nancy."

Young Ben's eyes grew brighter as he listened to his sister, but he didn't speak a word.

"Of course. I'll do what I can for you," said Elijah at length, "and although I don't want you to leave us I think all the better of you for the way you have put things. You are a right plucky lass."

"I am not plucky at all," replied Nancy; "it's only just common honesty to want to earn one's living."

"But you must stay here," insisted Jessie; "that's settled. We could easily fix up one of those top rooms for Nancy to work in, couldn't we, mother?"

"I am afraid I couldn't allow that," replied Nancy before Mrs. Briggs had time to speak. "You don't know how I appreciate your kindness, but I really couldn't foist myself upon you in that way. Besides, I want to win off my own bat; I want to see if I am any good in the world. I shouldn't feel as if I fulfilled my promise to my father if I lived here with you. Perhaps it's foolishness on my part, but I am awfully proud, and while I hope you will always let me visit you, I want everything to be as if I were a common or garden girl—as I am."

"But at least you will stay with us till Christmas," cried Jessie.

"Don't tempt me," pleaded Nancy. "As you know, I'd love to stay; but I mustn't. I am sure there are lodgings I could get quite easily, and then—I should be free and independent."

"The lass is right," affirmed Elijah, as his wife began to protest. "I can see what she has in her mind, and I admire her for it. Not but what we all want her to stay here; but I know what our Jessie is. She'd be always wanting to go here, and go there, and taking this holiday and that holiday, until the lass wouldn't be able to find time to do what she's got it in her heart to do. Nay, she mun go."

"But fancy you going into poky lodgings," said Jessie. "Fancy you sitting all alone of an evening, or wandering around the town by yourself. Why, you'd go mad."

"No, I shouldn't go mad. I should be as happy as a Queen—if I could make good. And I *will* make good too," she added with flashing eyes.

"But I thought you meant to be a teacher or something of that sort," objected Mrs. Briggs.

"Teacher!" cried Elijah. "There's no brass i' that. Of course it's genteel and all that sort of thing, but it doesn't pay well, I can see that. Still, I don't quite understand Nancy, lass. You say your father left you a legacy, a legacy which meant your making a lot of money. How much?"

"Ten thousand pounds at least," cried the girl.

"Ten thousand pounds!" exclaimed the Yorkshireman.

"Nay, nay, lass, you are not talking sense now."

"I must get it; I *must*!" cried the girl with set teeth and compressed lips.

"But what can you want all that brass for?"

"I would tell you if I dared, but somehow I can't. I owe it to my father's memory," she added.

"But think, lass, think. Ten thousand pounds! It's a sight of brass is that. If you were a lad now instead of a lass it might be done, but—but— No, I see no daylight. Why, s'pose you became successful as a designer and got a salary of say, five hundred pounds a year, how could you save ten thousand pounds?"

"But I must do it," cried the girl. "That's why I must start at once."

"But how will you set to work?"

"I am going to get into lodgings right away. I shall be able to pay for a room of my own and I shall study the designs of all the best manufacturers. After that I shall produce my own."

"Ay," replied Elijah thoughtfully, "and what then?"

"Then I shall take them to the best people I know of. Perhaps you will help me there," went on the girl after a

silence. "I am sure if you will give me a letter of introduction I shall be able to get a hearing. Not that I want them to take my stuff if it's useless," she added, as if divining the Yorkshireman's thoughts. "I couldn't allow that. Perhaps out of respect for you some of them might be tempted to do that, but I don't want——"

"Ay, lass, you don't know Yorkshire and Lancashire manufacturers if you think that," broke in Elijah Briggs. "Business is business with us, I can tell you, and if the Queen herself were to submit designs, no Yorkshireman would take them unless he saw brass in them. I'll give you all the letters of introduction you want; but that's all I can do."

"That's all I want," cried Nancy.

"And if they turn out to be no good," queried Mrs. Briggs, "what then?"

"~~Then~~ I must try something else," was the girl's response; "try until I succeed. For I *will* succeed."

"Ay, so you will," assented Elijah. "It's quite on the cards that a clever girl like you will produce good designs; taking designs; it might be too that you may get a post as a designer to a good firm; but that won't take you far. I see no ten thousand pounds in that."

"It may open a way to other things, though," cried Nancy, flushed with the thought of success.

"But why should you leave us?" pleaded Jessie. "I can't see any reason at all in that."

"She's right," assented Elijah Briggs again. "She mun be where she can have all the time she wants to herself. And I believe I can help her in that too. Didn't you tell me, mother, that Mary Judson, old Amos Judson's lass, was looking out for a suitable young woman to lodge wi' her?"

"Ay, but Mary Judson!" cried Mrs. Briggs scornfully. "Why, she must be thirty-five and is as ugly as sin. She's as sour as vinegar too, and as near as an Armenian Jew. You'll never want Nancy to lodge wi' her?"

"Yes, and an old maid," asseverated Jessie; "just a

crotchety old maid with as many foibles as if she were born on the first of April."

"She's a good heart," replied Elijah, "and she lives in a nice little house. She's clever too, rare and clever, and I believe she could give Nancy all she wanted in the way of house room. Why, talk about chemistry, I am told she's fair gone on it."

"Fair gone on it!" repeated Mrs. Briggs; "why, she's just lunny like her father was before her. Old Amos Judson was always going to make his fortune by some wild-cat scheme or other. First he was going to revolutionize the dyeing trade with a new dye; then he invented a new loom which was going to save I don't know how much labour, after that there was summat else. But what did it all amount to? He left Mary nothing but yon little house, a lot of stinking chemicals, and that workshop at the back. Ay, and Mary is just as bad as he was. I am told that she sits night after night reading, and making experiments. What sort of a critter is that to send our Nancy to live with?"

Elijah Briggs laughed good-humouredly. "Ay, all you say is true, Mary is a sour old maid. I don't suppose she ever had the chance to get wed in her life. No man as I ever heard of would have the pluck to take her on. Some say she's cracked in the upper story, but for all that she's a lot of gumption. But it's this way: Nancy says she won't live here, and while we would be as glad as birds to have her I agree with her. Now where shall she go? She's made up her mind to get work as a designer, but she knows nowt about it; she wants experience, she wants practice, she wants a suitable place to live in. Where can she get it? She has very little money and she's nean the sort that'll take charity from anyone. Can she get what she wants in any ordinary cottage where they take in lodgers? You know what our Leeds cottages are like, and they're noan suitable for her. Well, now, here's Mary Judson. Her father died a few months ago and left her just enough to live on with a superior sort of

cottage. It stands in its own grounds too, and is nice and roomy. A few weeks ago Mary had an illness, and since then she has been advised to have a servant maid which she cannot very well afford to keep, so she's on the look out for a superior sort of a lodger, and it seems to me——.

"I must go to see her," cried Nancy, "I will go to-morrow. I am sure it must be just the place I want."

"But she's such a sour vinegary old thing," objected Jessie.

"Ay, and sometimes hardly speaks a word from week-end to week-end," added Mrs. Briggs.

"She's respectable, I suppose?" asked Nancy.

"Ay, respectable eno'," admitted Mrs. Briggs. "There was a time when old Amos held his head high in the town, and was looked upon as the best-educated man in Leeds. He threw away a lot of good money after his fal-de-rals too. As I told you he was always going to revolutionize the town with his inventions, but naught ever came of them. As for Mary, I suppose that in her way she's fair and clever. Old Amos had her taught all sorts of out-of-the-way things, and some say she knows more about chemistry than her father did. Ay, she's respectable right enough, and in spite of all her mad ways she holds her head as high as anybody."

"Then I'll go and see her to-morrow," asserted Nancy again. "At any rate, it can't do any harm."

During all this time Ben Briggs had been listening eagerly, hardly ever speaking a word. He had lit cigarette after cigarette, but before any of them were half consumed he had thrown them away. More than once he had seemed to be on the point of breaking in on the conversation, but had refrained from doing so. Had either of the people in the room been watching him, they would have noticed that he was much excited. His square jaw was set and firm; his lips were quivering. Only once had he moved from his post by the mantelpiece since the conversation had commenced, and he still stood there even when

his father arose and announced his intention of going to bed.

"Good night, Ben, lad."

"Good night, father."

"I am glad to see you've stayed at home of an evening lately," remarked Mrs. Briggs, going to him and giving him a kiss. "It's a bit of a change."

Ben gave his mother a perfunctory peck and watched while that lady left the room.

"Are you staying here all night, Ben?" asked Jessie, who was also preparing to retire for the night.

"It depends," replied Ben.

"Depends on what?"

"You have all had your talk with Nancy," Ben asserted; "now I want my turn."

"All right, I'll stay here and listen to you."

"No, you won't," retorted Ben. "I want to talk to Nancy alone. Can you spare me half an hour?" and he looked pleadingly at the girl.

"Certainly," replied Nancy. "What do you want to say to me?"

"I will tell you when Jessie's gone," he replied, looking significantly at his sister.

Jessie looked wonderingly at her brother, and then left the room without a word.

CHAPTER VII

BEN BRIGGS PROPOSES

"WON'T you sit down?" he asked awkwardly, for Nancy was standing a little distance from him waiting for him to speak.

"Certainly, if you wish me to," she replied brightly.

"I don't agree with this scheme of yours at all," he announced decidedly after a few seconds' silence.

"No? I am sorry for that. I was hoping that perhaps you might be able to help me."

"I want to help you, but not in that way; it's foolishness; it's madness."

"What's madness?"

"Your going away from here; your scheme about earning your living and making a lot of money. You can never do it, never."

"You don't think I am capable of earning my living, then?"

"I can't allow it, that's all."

"Can't *allow* it? I don't think I understand you, Mr. Ben."

"Why do you persist in calling me 'Mr.'? I call you Nancy without prefixing it by a 'Miss.'"

At this there was an awkward silence which lasted for some seconds.

"I say," burst out Ben presently, "you like me, don't you?"

"Of course I like you. I think I like every one in Yorkshire."

"Yes, but I don't mean in that way; I mean in a special way."

Ben had not meant to approach the subject he had in his heart in this manner at all, but in spite of himself he was greatly excited and very nervous. He was a typical Yorkshire youth. It was true the years he had spent at Harrow and Oxford had left their mark upon him, but he was nevertheless a product of a Yorkshire manufacturing town. Up to this time, while popular with the opposite sex, and often called a lady-killer by his father, he had had no serious love affairs. As he had declared again and again, he didn't believe in sentiment and "that kind of rot." While he fully meant to get married some day, he informed his parents that he intended to arrange it in a practical, common-sense way.

"I don't believe in frills, and romance, and that sort of thing," he told his mother, who had accused him of trifling with young women's hearts. "Marriage is the least romantic thing I know of; it's a matter for common sense, and sound business principles."

All the same, Ben had no mean opinion of himself. Rather good looking, and having a good income, he was a favourite among girls, and he had been assured, again and again, that some of the best girls in Leeds could be his for the asking. Perhaps it was no wonder, therefore, that Ben had a good opinion of himself, and believed that all he had to do was to hold up his finger in order to get anyone he wanted.

When Nancy first came to Woodroyd he regarded her rather critically, and, if the truth must be told, a little superciliously. It was true he had heard of her as belonging to an old and historic family, but as he declared again and again, "he reckoned nought of historic families." There were any number of them in Yorkshire who had either practically petered out, or had gone into business in order to keep their heads above water. Besides, he knew he was a "good catch," to use the ordinary phraseology, and that an old name counted for nothing in these modern days.

As we have said, therefore, Ben had at first regarded Nancy rather superciliously, although he admitted that

she was a good-looking, attractive girl. What surprised him, however, was that she did not seem to regard him as in any way especially desirable, neither did she try to attract him. She was very pleasant, spoke to him quite frankly, and behaved in a perfectly natural way. But that was all. Unlike Alice Lister, who, as his father said, threw herself at him, and was always flattering him, Nancy seemed to prefer Jessie's society to his own, and would a great deal rather talk to his father than to himself.

This had put Ben upon his mettle. "After all, what is she?" he asked himself. "She's just a school chum of Jessie's and she's as poor as a church mouse. When she knows a bit more about me she'll be different."

But she wasn't. She quickly learnt about Ben's prospects, and no doubt realized that in a few years he would be one of the richest men in that county of rich men, but she didn't appear in the least impressed. For that matter, she did not seem to regard Ben in the light of a marriageable man at all, neither did she enter into the general competition for him.

During the first week of her stay, while Ben admitted that there was something about her different from the girls he knew, he never thought of her in the light of the future Mrs. Ben Briggs. He would have flirted with her had she been willing to flirt, but that was all. As the days flew away, however, Ben became more and more enamoured of her. Instead of going to his club of a night to play bridge or billiards, he made some excuse for being near Nancy, and when she did not appear to be very impressed by this mark of his especial favour, he was more than a little chagrined.

At the end of a week he ceased to criticize and became an ardent admirer. Yes, she was superior to any girl he knew, and he found himself quoting an old Yorkshireman whose favourite saying was that "blood and breeding tells."

"After all," he thought, "she'd make a grand wife." And it would be something, too, to tell people that he

had married a Miss Trevanion, whose ancestors were at one time the friends of kings.

At the end of a fortnight he had practically made up his mind. After all, there was no girl in Leeds who could hold a candle to her. She possessed something which other girls did not possess. Of course, she hadn't any money, but that didn't matter; he had enough for both. She possessed something more valuable than money; she had charm, she had personality; it might seem as though the greatness of past years had descended to her, and he wellnigh made up his mind to make her his wife.

For never a doubt entered his mind concerning Nancy's willingness. Why, she would jump at him. Wasn't he Ben Briggs, one of the most sought after young men in Leeds? How then could he think of her as refusing him? Whenever, or wherever, could she think of having such another chance? Why, if he didn't marry her, the girl would have to get her own living as a school teacher, or something of that sort, and what girl would be such a fool as to live single and be a school teacher when she could marry him? No, that did not trouble him at all, and he hesitated only because he was expected to do better.

For, true to his Yorkshire instincts, Ben believed that a big fortune was a natural concomitant to marriage. There were girls who would have fifty thousand pounds, yes, and more than fifty thousand pounds on the day of their marriage, who would be glad to have him, and thus the thought of taking a penniless girl to wife was out of accord with all the plans he had made.

At the end of the third week, however, this hesitation also went. Nancy had become the only girl in the world for him, and without her life would be a poor, barren thing, in spite of the fact that he was "making brass fast." Not that he would let her know this; he still professed to be an unbeliever in sentiment, and outwardly laughed at romance, even although his heart beat faster when Nancy entered the room, or when he heard her laughing and talking with Jessie.

As we have said, he listened with great interest while the girl told his father of her plans, and more than once was on the point of speaking. In fact, the thought of Nancy taking lodgings in the town, and seeking a post as a designer to some manufacturing firm, angered him. He could not allow, would not allow, the girl in whom he had become so interested to do such a thing, and he would not be slow in telling her so when the right time came.

Still, his courage almost failed him when at length his father and mother departed for bed, and he saw Nancy and Jessie on the point of following them. But timidity was not one of Ben's failings. He had a good deal of John Bullism in his nature, and when he once made up his mind to do a thing he was not easily turned aside. True to his business instincts, he had been obliged to take part in the conversation when the change of people's tastes concerning house decoration had been mentioned. This was a sore point of argument between Ben and his father, and when Nancy's opinion had coincided with his own, he could not help trying to score over his father; but beyond that he had been quiet. He had listened carefully to every word she had said, and while he had admired, what had seemed to him, her commercial instinct, he would of course have none of it.

Nevertheless, he was angry with himself; angry because he was excited; angry, because the things he had meant to say would not come to him. Not that he had any doubt, even now, of what the upshot of the conversation would be; but he felt nervous; nervous beyond all thought.

"You came here as Jessie's friend," he went on, "as her old schoolfellow; and of course I called you Nancy."

"Without my permission," added the girl a little mischievously.

"Why, don't you like it?" he asked in astonishment.

"I don't know that I ever gave it a thought," and he could not understand the tone in her voice.

"Anyhow," he went on, "I hope you won't call me 'Mr. Ben' any more; the time has come to end that."

"Indeed! Why?"

"Because I want to say something serious to you; something that will upset all that nonsense about what you and my father have been talking."

"Nonsense?" repeated Nancy. "Your father is one of the wisest men I ever met, and as you heard, he congratulated me upon being a very sensible girl."

"Yes, but my father doesn't know what's in *my* mind; no one knows but myself. I've never told anyone, and I shouldn't have spoken so soon but for the things you have just been saying. Still, I'm glad it has come to a head."

"What's come to a head?"

"Everything. Now look here, I don't agree with what you and father have been talking about at all, and what's more, I'm not going to have it."

Although Nancy had not thought of Ben as a possible lover, she could not help seeing his meaning. His voice was husky and his florid face had become almost pale. His lips were tremulous too, and the cigarette which was between his fingers shook. Nevertheless he was Ben Briggs, the self-satisfied, confident young man still. He spoke with such assurance and confidence that Nancy's pride was touched.

"Do you mean to say that you've assumed the *role* of telling me what I shall and what I shan't do?" asked the girl, and her voice was a little hard, although there was a laugh in it.

"Maybe I have," he replied; "anyhow, I am not going to allow it."

"Allow what?"

"I am not going to allow you to lodge with Mary Judson, or to go getting a post as a designer in some linen manufacturer's firm."

"Indeed! Why?" Something in the girl's voice unsettled him, made him uncomfortable. She still spoke pleasantly, and there was a smile on her lips; but her tones somehow suggested something hard—steely. Her eyes looked forbidding too, and in spite of her smile, there

was something that placed a barrier between them, a barrier which he could not understand.

But of course he was not dismayed; the barrier or whatever it was must be broken down; no girl had ever got the better of Ben Briggs, and he would see to it that it should not happen now.

"Perhaps I have begun the wrong way," he admitted after a few seconds' silence; "perhaps I shouldn't have said what I did say. That talk about your leaving here to get your own living angered me, made me feel mad. It's all wrong and it mustn't be."

"But why?"

"Because I've other plans for you," he replied doggedly.

"Because you've other plans for me?" repeated the girl.

"Yes, other plans."

"What are they?" and Ben could not help noticing the quality of her voice.

The question somewhat staggered him. While he had no doubt whatever as to the final outcome of their interview, he realized that his way of conducting the conversation lacked *finesse*. It would never do for him to openly assume that the girl would fall in with his wishes without question. He noticed the proud look in her eyes, marked the hard, metallic tone in her voice. Her smile, too, had gone, and something like fear entered his heart.

"Look here," he blurted out, "you told father just now that you were left poor, and that you had made up your mind to make ten thousand pounds."

"Yes," admitted Nancy.

"Well, you can't make it; it's outside the realms of possibility. Father told you that, didn't he?"

"Ye-s," she admitted hesitatingly.

"And father was right. He knows what making money means; knows the trade of Yorkshire from thread to needle. All the same, there is no place in England where money can be made like it's made here—— Do you know the profits of Elijah Briggs & Son for the last year?"

"I have not the slightest idea."

"No, you wouldn't. Anyhow, it's one of the soundest and best-paying businesses in the county. Ten thousand pounds is nothing to a firm like ours."

"I'm glad to hear it," replied Nancy.

"I thought you would be. Well, you want to make ten thousand pounds—why you want such a lot of money I don't know, neither do I ask—just now."

Nancy was silent.

"The fact is," went on Ben, "I am awfully fond of you, and although we have only known each other for three weeks I would do anything for you, *anything*. You've only just got to mention it and I'll do it."

"You are awfully kind," replied the girl.

He did not know what else she could have said, and yet her answer did not satisfy him. Even then he fancied what Alice Lister would have said under similar circumstances, and he realized the difference between the two.

"It's not kind at all," he went on, "I simply can't help myself. I never felt to any other girl what I feel toward you. Why, I can't help thinking of you, night or day. Haven't you noticed it?"

"I am afraid I haven't," replied Nancy. "I never gave it a thought."

"Well, there it is, anyhow; I am just head over heels in love with you. That's why I can't agree to this wild-cat scheme of yours of going in for designing. As for going to lodge with Mary Judson, it's all nonsense."

Ben's confidence had all come back to him as he spoke. Now that his confession was made, he saw his way clearly before him.

"I know I am only a junior partner yet," he went on; "but I can command a good deal of money even now, while father has told me more than once that in a few years he will go out of the business and leave everything entirely to me."

"Still, I don't see what that has to do with me," and there was a suggestion of hauteur in her voice.

"Don't you?" cried Ben. "Why, it has everything to do with you. As I told you, I have fallen head over heels in love with you, and when once we're wed you can have practically what money you like. I'll make you a good husband too, and you shall have a position in the town second to none. Why, if you are ambitious I'll even go into Parliament, although I'm not much of a hand at politics. Still, I'd do anything for you, I would really. Come now, what do you say? Shan't we settle it up?"

Ben looked steadily at Nancy during this long speech and was terribly disappointed at the impression he had made. With his disappointment too came another feeling. Had he spoken as he ought to have spoken? Had he not made a mistake in approaching her in this way? Perhaps Cornish girls were different from those in Yorkshire. He reflected that Nancy was a Trevanion and belonged to one of the proudest families in England. It was true he had pretended to scorn such things, but might there not be something in it? Of course, Nancy had not mentioned her family, except to explain why it had become so poor; but might not her upbringing have made her different from the girls with whom he constantly associated? Had he not made a mistake in mentioning money at all? Then he called to mind her conversation with his father; remembered how she had told him that her great aim was to get ten thousand pounds within a given period. That was what had led him to speak that night. Yes, he was sure he had done right.

And yet he was altogether dissatisfied. He watched the changing expression on her face, and thought he saw amusement mingled with anger; thought he saw doubt as well as indignation; he wondered what was in her mind.

For Nancy did not speak for some time; she might have been reflecting as to what answer she should make.

"Of course I am very flattered," she managed to say at length, "and——"

"No, don't put it that way," broke in Ben; "I am not

flattering you at all. I am right down in earnest. I never felt for any girl what I feel for you, and I'll give you anything you want. I'll buy a good house in the best part of Leeds, you shall have as many servants as you like, and the best Rolls-Royce that's to be got for money. Why, I believe I fair worship you."

"Am I to regard this as an offer of marriage?" she said after another awkward silence

"Of course you are!" replied Ben eagerly. "Didn't I make it plain? If I didn't I am sorry; but I'm so excited that I don't know what I'm saying. I have always laughed at sentiment and that kind of thing, but I'm fair bowled out. Come, let's settle it up right away," and Ben, who had been standing at some little distance away, took a step toward her.

"Of course I am greatly flattered," she repeated, "but it's impossible, Mr. Ben."

"Impossible!" cried the young Yorkshireman in astonishment. "You don't mean that?"

"I am afraid I do."

"Why is it impossible? No, no, I can't take that answer," and Ben's voice was husky and tremulous. "You are joking," he persisted; "you can't mean it."

"I am afraid you must take it that I do," and perhaps there was a touch of gratified pride in her voice. For, as may be imagined, Nancy could not help recalling Ben's tones of assurance. "Of course," she went on, "I feel tremendously honoured, but to tell the truth I had never thought of such a thing. Until to-night I never imagined that you preferred me to your other lady friends, and so——"

"Other lady friends!" said Ben contemptuously.

"Why, I never thought of a girl in the way of marrying her before. But with you it's altogether different; I fair worship you. Come now, don't turn me down; you can't mean to do that. And mind, when you come to think about it, it'll not be such a bad thing for you either."

Coarsely though the words were spoken, Nancy realized the truth in them, and when she compared the position he offered her with that she had discussed with Elijah Briggs an hour before, she felt it all the more keenly. After all, wasn't her own scheme of life hare-brained and foolish? She had planned to learn designing, and perhaps get an appointment with some manufacturing firm; but even if this were possible of accomplishment, how could she get ten thousand pounds? The thing seemed utter madness. Then she thought of the long years of struggling; of working amidst gloomy surroundings; of lonely hours in a smoke-begrimed town, and of possible failure at the end of it. On the other hand, Ben's offer had its allurements. During the three weeks she had spent in this capital of the North she had become more and more impressed by the power of money. The very room in which she sat shouted aloud of it, and she knew the comfort that money could buy. Besides, the thing she hoped for was within her grasp. If she married Ben Briggs she could buy back Trevanion Court, she could again become the owner of the home of her fathers. It was true she did not love him, and he had spoken to her in a way that angered her, but there was no doubt of his sincerity. He wasn't a clown either. Although only of the second generation of the newly rich, he had had the advantage of a good public school, and had spent three years in an old university town. And although he was characterized by self-complacency he had a certain *savoir faire* peculiar to some Yorkshiremen. Besides, he was rich, and Nancy hated poverty.

But she could not do it. Much as she loved the thought of again possessing her old home, she loathed the idea of selling herself to a man she did not love in order to do it. Besides, she was young, and her youth gave wings to her confidence. She was sure that in five years she would get enough money to buy back her old home. She did not see how, but that did not matter; she would. Much as she might be tempted by Ben Briggs's money, it would

not seem like fulfilling her promise to her father if she bought it back by marrying him.

Then another question came to her: Would her father have consented for her to marry him? She knew the proud old aristocrat. He might have been only a farmer, but the blood of the Trevanions was in his veins, and he would look with scorn on this rich young upstart.

"No, Mr. Ben," she managed to say, "I appreciate the very great honour you would confer upon me, but I must persist in saying no."

"But you can't mean it! Why—why——"

"I am afraid I do."

"Then you would rather go on this wild-goose chase of yours than——?"

"Yes, if you put it that way, I would."

Up to now Ben had not seriously believed that Nancy meant her refusal; but as he saw the look of steady resolution in her eyes he realized that she was in earnest. Nancy Trevanion meant what she said, and he realized what had taken place. He, Ben Briggs, was rejected as though he were a nobody. Why, he would become the laughing-stock of the town. People would nudge one another as he passed, and speak of him as being turned down by a girl who wasn't worth a penny. The thought was horrible!

Still, in the face of what she said what could he do? She was a guest in his father's house, and he couldn't speak angrily to her, and yet he wanted to do something mad, something outrageous.

"I am sorry if I've hurt your feelings," Nancy said after another awkward silence, and then as if divining his thoughts she went on, "Let us agree, Mr. Ben, to regard your proposal as unmade."

"What do you mean by that?" he asked savagely.

"It is made, and can never be unmade."

"But we needn't think of it as such," replied the girl.

"How can that be? Besides, what shall I say to Jessie when she asks what our long interview meant?"

"There will be nothing to say to her except that you've thought of another means whereby I could carry out my plans."

"You mean to say, then, that you will say nothing about what I've said to you?"

"Certainly not. We'll regard your proposal as unmade."

"By gum!" he cried, "you're a grand girl after all, and I love you all the more for saying that."

"That's all right, then," and Nancy rose to her feet. "Good night, Mr. Ben; our interview is a secret between ourselves."

"But I am not going to give up hope yet!" cried the young Yorkshireman. "You may think you've finished with me, but you haven't."

"Good night," repeated the girl and she held out her hand. He grasped it eagerly while determination shone from his eyes.

"No," he cried, "I am not going to give up hope! I'll have you yet! You mayn't think so now; but as sure as the sun will rise to-morrow morning you'll come to my way of thinking. I've always managed to get what I wanted in life, and I'll get you. Yes, you may go now, but I'm going to get you."

A feeling like fear came into Nancy's heart as she left the room: Ben's words seemed to her like a prophecy.

CHAPTER VIII

MARY JUDSON

"**Y**OU'VE given up your mad schemes, haven't you, Nancy?" was Jessie's greeting as she entered her bedroom the next morning.

"Given them up?" cried Nancy with a laugh. "Of course I haven't. Directly after breakfast I am going to see Miss Mary Judson, and if possible I'm going to arrange about lodging with her."

"You don't mean that?"

"What can I mean else?"

Jessie was in a state of great excitement. She had noted the look on her brother's face the night before, and felt sure of what he had meant to do. She had been sorely tempted to wait up for Nancy, and to learn what had taken place; but even yet something of the old fear which she had felt for her at St. Andrews remained with her. Nancy was three years older than she, and was still looked upon by the younger girl as a superior being.

"But didn't Ben——?"

"Your brother was awfully kind to me," broke in Nancy. "He didn't at all agree with what your father and I talked about, and suggested something else. He thought my plans were clumsy, and would take too long to carry out."

"But"—and the girl looked eagerly into Nancy's face—"didn't he—aren't you and Ben engaged? Oh, I do hope you are! I'd love to have you as my sister more than anything else."

"Engaged! What ever made you think of such a thing?"

"But didn't Ben propose to you?"

"Don't be foolish, Jessie. Who would ever think of your brother marrying a penniless girl like I am? Such a thing is utterly impossible."

"But I am sure Ben is in love with you, and——"

"He's never told you such a thing?"

"No, but when I saw his face last night——"

"Now look here, Jessie, I am not even going to discuss such a mad thing; it is utterly out of the question. Mr. Ben tried to be very good to me last night; he had thought of another plan which he believed to be better than mine, and—that's all; but as you know, I am awfully stupid and I'm going to stick to my own plans. That is why I want you to go with me to see Miss Judson after breakfast. Isn't it awfully exciting? Fancy me having rooms of my own in Miss Judson's house! Fancy me making striking designs which will make the fortunes of the people who are lucky enough to accept them! No, you must not even think of that other nonsense, much less talk about it, even to your father and mother."

Thus Nancy met Jessie's eager curiosity, and although girl-like she still believed that her brother had proposed to Nancy, she was by no means sure; and when, directly after breakfast, they started together to call on Miss Judson, Nancy was so merry and in such good spirits that at length the young girl, much to her own disappointment, had to believe that she had been mistaken.

Miss Mary Judson lived at Laburnum Cottage in Rhododendron Street. The man who named both street and house must have been a humorist, for there was not a sign of a rhododendron within a mile of the street, neither was there any suggestion of a laburnum tree near Miss Judson's cottage. Neither, for that matter, was it a street at all; it was simply a road which ended in a *cul-de-sac*. The houses were nearly all single-fronted, and built of stone common to the district. Laburnum Cottage was, however, different and superior to all the rest. It was built on a plot of ground divided from the other houses by a substantial wall. It was also double-fronted, and,

comparing it with the other houses, presented quite an imposing appearance. Added to this, it had quite a large yard at the back. In this yard Amos Judson had, years before, built what might have been taken for a stable, but which he had used for a laboratory; for Amos had, in his day, been noted as a chemist, and, as Mrs. Briggs had declared, had cherished hopes of making a fortune by one of his many inventions.

When Nancy and Jessie first entered Rhododendron Street the former was much depressed and dismayed. The houses looked so dark and uninteresting, especially when compared with the glories of Woodroyd, that the thought of living there seemed too horrible for words. When she saw Laburnum Cottage, however, she was cheered a little. It stood back from the road, and the palisading which surmounted the wall near the road was newly painted, also the flag-stone path which led up to the front door was what Yorkshire people called "ruddled," and looked quite bright and cheery. The front door was also newly painted, while the curtains which hung before the windows on either side looked, in spite of the grime of the city, spotlessly clean. Of course, it was only a cottage, but it looked at least a comfortable cottage, and Nancy was cheered accordingly.

The door was opened by a pasty-faced and somewhat tired-looking woman of perhaps forty years of age. At first Nancy wondered whether this might be Miss Judson or not. She wore neither cap nor apron, and spoke in a somewhat brusque and independent way, common to Yorkshire people.

"Are you Miss Judson?"

"Nay, I am noan Miss Judson."

Jessie tittered a little at this, as she knew Miss Judson by sight.

"Is Miss Judson in?"

"Ay, she's in. I expect you can see her; she's noan over busy. If you will wait here I'll fetch her," and without another word the woman left the two girls

standing on the doorstep while she hurried down the passage.

A minute later she returned again.

"She'll be here in a minute," she informed them; "she's out i' t' yard." Then looking towards Jessie she said, "Are yo' 'Lijah Briggs's lass?"

"Yes," replied Jessie.

"I tho'ght you wer. Coom inside, will you?" and she led the way into one of the front rooms.

Nancy looked eagerly around her, and was surprised at the air of comfort which prevailed. The room itself was bigger than she had expected to see, judging from the outside, and it was furnished with solid substantial things. Although designated the parlour, a heavy table occupied the middle of the room, and two rather well-upholstered chairs were placed on either side of the fireplace. A sofa corresponding with the chairs stood near one of the walls and a thick, heavy piled, loud-patterned carpet covered the floor. There was also a mahogany bookshelf containing a number of well-bound volumes, while on the gay wallpaper were several portraits in oils. These, with a few other articles, made up the appointments of the room. Not one item, as far as Nancy could see, suggested a thought of beauty, but everything spoke of comfort; solid, substantial comfort.

She had scarcely noticed these things when the door opened and another woman came into the room. This Nancy surmised at a glance was Miss Mary Judson. She was a tall and somewhat gaunt-looking woman of from thirty-five to forty years of age. Her hair, which was fast turning grey, was thick and coarse, her features were somewhat large, and she had high cheek-bones and a stern, determined-looking glance. Not an unpleasant woman by any means, but capable and resolute. To the watchful physiognomist, the most striking thing in Miss Judson's face was the quality of her eyes; not unpleasant eyes, although they were deep set, and overhung by a broad masculine brow. But they had a peculiar expression. In one sense they looked hard and merciless, in another

they were appealing and suggested tenderness. But they were quick and observant, eyes which told of brains behind them ; eyes which proclaimed that their owner was a capable, understanding woman.

"Yes ? " queried Miss Judson on entering, " Sarah Ellen says you want to see me." Then giving a quick glance at Jessie she went on : " Sarah Ellen says you are Elijah Briggs's girl. Won't you both sit down ? What can I do for you ? "

Nancy gave the woman a searching look before replying. Girl-like, she noted that although her dress had evidently either been home made, or designed by some seamstress who had not learnt the ABC of dressmaking, it was of good material ; noticed too her well-made boots ; her general air of respectability. More than that, she saw, or thought she saw, a woman who by no stretch of imagination could be called common ; even then it came to her that she would like to know more about Miss Judson.

"I hope you will forgive us if we are rude," Nancy said, "but Mr. Briggs gave me this letter early this morning, and it will explain to you why we came."

Mary Judson gave a swift glance at Nancy's smiling face and then turned to the letter.

Without a word she perused it to the end ; then, giving the girl a second glance, read it again ; after this she sat looking into the fireplace for more than a minute.

"Elijah says your name is Nancy Trevanion and that you come from Cornwall," she volunteered presently.

Nancy nodded her head assentingly.

"Are you one of these modern, cigarette-smoking, dancing, cocktail-drinking misses, or are you a sensible, God-fearing lass ? " she asked.

Nancy caught the humour of the situation.

"I hardly know how to answer you, Miss Judson," she said with a merry laugh. "Cigarette-smoking ? No, I don't smoke, neither do I drink cocktails, but I'm very fond of dancing. As for being sensible and God-fearing—it's a lot to say, isn't it ? But my father died a few weeks

ago and left me very poor, so I've got to earn my own living."

"And you mean to do it?" The question came out quickly and abruptly.

"Yes, I mean to do it."

"And you were not brought up to earn your own living?"

"I am afraid I was not," replied Nancy.

Miss Judson looked out of the window into the grey uninteresting road, and seemed in doubt. Then she took another look at Nancy's face and a softer look came into her eyes.

"You are a very bonny lass, anyhow I can see that."

"I am glad you think so, Miss Judson."

"Why is that? Being bonny only makes lasses vain."

"That depends, doesn't it? A bright, pleasant face may tell of good spirits, and a kind heart."

"Ay, and there are not many kind hearts about," said the woman reflectively. "And yet, perhaps there are—I don't want to speak harshly. Would you want to have a lot done for you?" she added. "Would you find fault with your food, and have finnickin' ways?"

"I have a tremendous appetite," laughed the girl; "as for finnickin' ways, I don't know what you mean."

"Ay, but would you want to order me around, and grumble if I didn't cook properly?—because if you would I'd rather stay as I am. Elijah says in his letter, that you come of a grand family. I know naught of grand families; but I know what it is to be left poor. My father, when he died, didn't cut up well."

"Cut up well?" queried Nancy.

"Ay, you don't know the meaning of our Yorkshire sayings. When a man dies and doesn't leave much money, people have a way of saying 'he doesn't cut up well'; but if he does, then they say he 'cuts up well.' Anyhow, my father didn't; and he left me what I expect your father left you, a lot of silly pride. For pride is silly. And yet I don't know—". then she lapsed into silence.

After a minute she went on : " No Judson ever came down in life so much as to be obliged to take in lodgers, and sometimes I think, in spite of everything, I won't do it. I should be ashamed to hear people say, ' Ay, but you've been obliged to take in lodgers.' And yet, what is there in it, after all ? I thought I had enough to live on ; ay, and I had too while I was well and strong ; but a few weeks ago I was taken ill, and since then I've had to have a woman to look after me. That's what makes it hard. If I had another pound a week I'd see all lodgers further first ; but I haven't ; that's why I've thought of swallowing my pride."

The woman spoke in a voice that was almost harsh and repellent ; but Nancy felt something of what lay behind it. She saw the humanness of the woman's heart ; saw what was in her mind ; and in a way she could not understand was drawn toward her.

" I don't think I'd be much trouble to you, Miss Judson," she said. " As for being a lodger, I don't want to be a lodger. Put it this way : I'll be your guest, and help you to bear the expenses of the house."

" Would you take it that way ? " asked Miss Judson quickly.

" I want to," and Nancy looked into her face with a bright laugh in her eyes.

" And do you think you could be comfortable with me ? "

" I am sure I could. Of course, I expect to have to work very hard ; at least, I hope I shall have to, and then I shan't have much time for gossip ; but we might cheer each other up during the long evenings."

" Ay, but you wouldn't care to talk with me."

" I'm sure I'd love to ; and you could tell me all about the days when your father lived."

Miss Judson looked at Nancy's face long and searchingly, saw the perfect oval of her face, the sensitive mouth, the white teeth, the determined little chin, the pure complexion, the shining hair. To the drab monotony of the woman's life she seemed like a visitant from a better land.

"And you wouldn't look down on me, because I took in a lodger?" she asked almost pleadingly.

"But I shouldn't be a lodger," laughed Nancy, "I should only be a friend who lived with you, and shared the household expenses."

Miss Judson rose suddenly to her feet. "Come with me," she said, "I want to show you the house; I want to show you your bedroom too. It's not a grand place, but it's clean and comfortable."

A few minutes later they had explored every room in the cottage. There were not many of them, and as Miss Judson more than once declared, they were not made for show; but they were all spotlessly clean, and everything seemed made for comfort.

"I am sure I shall love it," cried Nancy at length; "nothing could suit me better."

Half an hour later when Nancy left Laburnum Cottage, she had arranged to take up her abode there the next day, and there was a new look in Miss Judson's eyes as she watched the girl go down Rhododendron Street, with Jessie Briggs by her side.

"She's a grand lass," reflected the woman; "and yet I can't quite make her out. She's not a bit like the woman I meant to take into the house—if ever I did take in one. She's young, and laughing, and jolly, and she doesn't seem to have a set purpose in life like a young woman ought to have. And yet in a way she does. I don't think I ought to take her; she'll have a lot of lads after her, and all my old quiet days will be gone. But why shouldn't she have lads after her? She's young and pretty, and charming—ay, don't I wish I were young, and pretty, and charming!"

The woman stood for some time staring into vacancy, it might have been as though chords long dormant had been awakened to life.

"Ay, but I'm glad I made *that* plain, at all events"; and her shoulders became squared. "I made her promise that she wouldn't call herself my lodger; she's only a

friendly guest who's coming to live with me and help me in the expenses. No one shall ever say that I've lowered the family name."

The next day, amidst many fervid protests and all sorts of promises, Nancy left Woodroyd for Laburnum Cottage, Rhododendron Street.

"You must promise to come here to your meals on Sundays," Mrs. Briggs persisted.

"And I shall come to see you often," exclaimed Jessie, "and mind; we shall always go away for our holidays together."

"And if there is anything I can do for you, lass, you've only got to let me know," remarked Elijah Briggs. "Ay, but I'm rare and fond of you. I never in all my life saw a lass I took to more, and if I can ever put anything in your way I will."

Nancy was affected very much by all this, especially as she knew every word was sincere. For let this be known: although Yorkshire people have many faults, perhaps there is not a county in England so characterized by the honesty and sincerity of its inhabitants. Many of them may be rough, and some of them may be coarse, but they are known for their sincerity in an age of shallow insincerity.

There was no leave-taking between Nancy and Ben Briggs. Ben was not in the house when she left; he had purposely taken himself away. What Ben was suffering it was difficult to say. He had scarcely slept a wink during the night after Nancy had refused him; he had received the shock of his life. It was not only that he had fallen deeply in love with Nancy, and that the desire of his heart was not gratified. There were other facts. He was astonished beyond measure. He had never dreamed that any girl would think of refusing him—Ben Briggs. What could she expect? What could she want? It altogether baffled him. His confidence in himself had received a shattering blow. Could it be that he could have been mistaken in his own worth? For years he had been led to believe that any girl in Leeds, yes, and the

richest of them, could be his for the asking. And yet here was this proud girl from the West, who was confessedly poor, and who for some reason or another had set out to make money, wouldn't even give him a thought.

For the first two days, therefore, after Nancy's refusal Ben was dumbfounded, bewildered, and sick at heart. Presently, however, he began to take a more cheerful view of the matter. There had always been a saying among the Leeds boys of his acquaintance that "Ben Briggs always got what he wanted either sooner or later." And he would get Nancy either sooner or later. How he should do it he did not quite know; but he would. She would quickly get tired of her loneliness, and her fruitless endeavours to gain her heart's desire, and then she would turn to him. And he would be very magnanimous; yes he would. Meanwhile he would make brass; money was the golden key which unlocked the doors of the world, and he would forge that key. It might take him many years; but he would do it, and then he would have his reward.

CHAPTER IX

MARY JUDSON'S LEGACY

ONE evening, eight months after Nancy had taken up her abode in Laburnum Cottage, she sat alone almost on the point of crying.

It was a dull, foggy, cheerless evening in February, and the clammy, foggy atmosphere hung like a huge pall over the city. The girl was utterly depressed. Eight months before she had been light-hearted, buoyant, hopeful; indeed, she felt confident of success. She was perfectly sure that she could produce designs infinitely superior to those which had a ready sale, but after eight months of trying she had to reflect sadly that she had failed.

Not that her position was anything like hopeless. The great part of her three hundred pounds still remained, but she had made little or no progress towards the goal she aimed at.

She had worked hard too. She had made a thorough study of the production of woollen and linen fabrics. Acting on the advice of Elijah Briggs, she had determined not to make any overtures to manufacturers until she had thoroughly mastered the secrets of the craft which she hoped to make her own. With remarkable quickness too she had initiated herself into its mysteries, until, from a technical standpoint, she understood more about the Yorkshireman's special trade than many who had spent their whole life in it. But her productions were not wanted, neither were her services required.

Not that she failed to get a hearing; her very presence secured that. Many a hard-headed Yorkshireman gave her a welcome into his office, and was glad to discuss all

manner of things with her ; but when it came to doing business it was a different thing.

Nor was she long to discover two things. First, that the Yorkshireman was the most prejudiced, and the most conservative person on earth, and that it was as easy to smash Gibraltar as to break down the conventions with which the Yorkshireman surrounded himself. She quickly found out that while he prided himself on being broad-minded, and open to new ideas, he, in the main, walked along the grooves which his forefathers had made. Thus it was, that when a handsome and distinguished young girl who was "not Yorkshire," and had known nothing about the county until a few months before, came to him and asked him either to use designs she had produced, or to give her a job as a designer to his firm, he, while he admired her, laughed at her in his heart. It was not ordinary for a young girl to do such things, and as for a stranger coming from the West thinking she could teach him anything about designing, that was so much hare-brained nonsense.

The second thing she discovered was, that while the Yorkshireman was, in the main, sentimental to a degree, and a great admirer of female beauty, he always put business first.

"Is there any brass in it ? " was the question he invariably asked, and although many, in their heart of hearts, admired Nancy's handiwork and were carried away by the charm of her presence, this question was foremost with them.

No, there was no brass in it, and they were not to be bamboozled by a pretty girl's clever talk.

Thus it was that at the end of the eight months of her stay in Yorkshire, Nancy had made no perceptible progress. But her time had not been altogether wasted ; in a sense she had received a liberal education during those months. She had learnt the secrets of a great industry, and was able to talk intelligently about fibres, textures, colours, and other things appertaining to manufacturing. She had also learnt the geography of the district. She had studied Bradford,

Keighley, Dewsbury, Huddersfield, and dozens of other more or less important places of the great woollen and manufacturing world of Yorkshire. Added to that, she had been introduced to many of the industrial potentates of the county, and had studied the characteristics of a people who, perhaps, possessed more grit, determination, and bulldog tenacity than any other people in England. But as far as actual progress was concerned she had done practically nothing.

Especially had that day been disappointing. She had started out in the morning with high hopes; she had made an appointment with a man who had evidently been struck by her designs, and who, she hoped, would make use of them. When the interview took place, however, her hopes fell shattering to the ground; the man had seemed far more willing to make love to her than to pay serious attention to her productions.

"Nay, nay, lass," he had said in his rough Yorkshire way, for he was one of the newly rich, "you are a sight too bonny for this job."

"My bonniness, as you call it, has nothing whatever to do with it," replied Nancy. "The question is, are the things I've shown you any good?"

"They might be or they might not be," replied Joe Fletcher, as he was commonly called. "I don't say they're not good,—for that matter I think they are,—but a man who runs a mill has a big job in hand; he has to keep peace among all his workpeople. If I took this stuff I should arouse the dander of the man I keep as a designer, and then there'd be trouble. It's this way, Miss Trevanion. Every mill is a sort of big family, and that big family has hosts of jealousies, and rules, and regulations, and if the corns of one are trod on there are scores who'll sympathize wi'im. As I said, I don't say but what your designs are pretty, and they might be liked; but Sam Pilling, as my designer is called, would get his back up if I used them, and that would mean trouble in the whole place. Nay, Miss Trevanion, it won't do, you are near Yorkshire."

and you're bonny, and you've fine ways." Coom now, if I were you I'd give this thing up."

"Give it up? Why should I?"

"Because it's noan a lass's job. You with your education and taking ways, should go on another tike, or else wed a good far-seeing business man who would provide you with a good home. You're too bonny to go about this kind of work in either Yorkshire or Lancashire. Why, you could easily get a husband, a husband with brass, and what not. I know one who lives not ten miles from this room who'd be willing to take you on right away. Come now, what do you say?"

"Only this, Mr. Fletcher: if you won't take my work some one else will, and some day you'll regret the decision to which you have come."

"I'll take my chances of that," replied the Yorkshireman. "Why, I have miles of new designs brought to me every month, and mostly useless. Do you think that you, a lass coming from the West, clever as you may be, think you can teach us Yorkshire people our own business?—But there, I'm afraid I have given yo' more time than I can spare, and yo' can thank your pretty face for that."

As Nancy left Mr. Fletcher's office and went out into the humid atmosphere, it seemed to her that the end had come. Eight months of trying and no success. The streets were covered with black shiny mud, the air was foul with ill-smelling vapours, and the clouds of black smoke hung over the town like a pall.

Was it worth while trying any longer? Evidently this was not her *métier*. She cast her mind back to the day her father had died, and she pictured her old home in Cornwall. There, in the midst of the grim surroundings of the Yorkshire manufacturing town, she saw from afar, Trevanion Court as it had appeared to her on the day she left it; saw the old house lichen covered; stately yet homely, and flooded with precious memories. Saw the wide-spreading sweep of hill and dale, heard the murmur of

the sea. And she had promised her father that she would buy it back.

Ten thousand pounds!

It was a fabulous sum, and seemed as far removed from her as the planet Mars.

Why should she remain in Yorkshire? Why need she struggle any longer amid such grim surroundings in order to obtain something which seemed impossible? What could she do? Yes, the teaching profession was open to her, and no doubt her career at St. Andrew's behind her, and the distinctions which she had obtained at Cambridge, would stand her in good stead. Added to that the post of a teacher in a good school would give her a not unenviable position. But what was a teacher's life even in such a school as the one she knew and loved so well? She thought of the monotonous drudgery, of the everlasting toil, the imparting of knowledge to a lot of more or less adolescent girls. Yes, it was respectable enough, but what did it end in? The plums of that profession were only open to a few. Besides, she was not cast in a teacher's mould, and she hated the thought of it. Hadn't she better accept Mr. Fletcher's advice and make a suitable marriage?

But no, she would not give up,—that would be an act of cowardice. She knew there was no possibility of making money by teaching, while in Yorkshire and Lancashire there were all sorts of possibilities, and she would still struggle on.

When she reached Laburnum Cottage, however, her resolution had wellnigh given way. For some reason or other the maid had forgotten to light her fire, and the room was cold and cheerless. Looking out of the window and seeing only the ugly line of cottages which made up Rhododendron Street, it seemed to her the most depressing place on earth.

Rhododendron Street! What a piece of irony to call it by such a name, and then she remembered the avenue of rhododendrons that grew near her old home. Yes, she *must*, she *would*, buy it back.

At that moment Miss Mary Judson came into the room. "What, no fire?" she remarked as she looked at the black grate. "You don't mean to say that Sarah Ellen has forgotten to light it?"

"I think she must have," replied Nancy.

"Ay, it's a shame; and such a cold night too. I'll go and get it lit right away. You're looking pale too. Aren't you well?"

"I'm a bit tired, that's why."

"Tired and downhearted," said Miss Judson kindly.

"Things have not been going well with you, have they?"

"I have not been getting any forrader anyhow," was Nancy's reply. "I am afraid you Yorkshire people do not think much of my work."

Miss Judson looked at her pityingly, almost anxiously.

"You are not going to give up, are you?"

"What's the use of trying? I have been at work now for eight months and have had no success whatever."

"Eight months!" repeated the woman a little impatiently.

"Well, isn't that a long time? It seems an eternity to me."

"Eight months!" repeated Miss Judson again. "Why, I——" the woman hesitated a few seconds and then went on: "Think of my father, he spent a lifetime in trying."

Nancy was silent; she had heard Amos Judson's story more than once.

"Yes, I know what you are thinking about," said Mary, divining the other's thoughts; "you are saying to yourself that he followed a *will-o'-the-wisp* of his own fancies for a lifetime and they all ended in nothing. Well, what if they did?"

Still Nancy was silent; she did not want to wound her friend by the mention of her father's failures.

"What if he did?" repeated Miss Judson. "His work wasn't useless." She looked out of the window for a few seconds and then went on: "The success of the world is built on failure."

"Is that a comfort to the failures?" Nancy could not help asking.

"It depends," replied the woman grimly. "But ay, lass, I do feel for you."

There was such a real kindness in her voice that the tears started to Nancy's eyes. She had told Miss Judson something of her plans soon after she had taken up her abode in Laburnum Cottage, and while the woman had made no remarks either for or against, her very silence had an element of sympathy in it.

"You are downhearted, aren't you?"

"I am a bit," Nancy confessed. "I suppose I am impatient; but when I see what—what has a ready sale, and then think of my own work, which I am sure is a hundred times better, being refused, I am ready to give up hope. I did think when I went out this morning that I should have better luck, but it was the same story."

"Tell me about it?" asked Mary Judson.

Whereupon Nancy related her interview with Joe Fletcher.

"And he asked you to marry him, did he?"

"I suppose he meant that."

A long silence fell between them, so long that Nancy turned and looked at Mary Judson's face. Her lips were quivering, and her eyes were brimming over with tears.

"Ay," said the woman presently, "but you are bonny. No wonder the men all want you."

"I'd rather they would want my work."

"Ay, I know. Sometimes I think—— But there, I won't tell you what I think."

"Do tell me," pleaded Nancy.

"Ay, Nancy lass, but you are young and pretty, while I am middle-aged and ugly. All the lads run after you, but none of them ever ran after *me*. Why should they? I was always plain. But no, there was one——" and the woman sighed.

"One?" repeated Nancy.

"Ay, there was one," and a new look came into Mary

Judson's eyes. "He didn't mind my being plain; he didn't mind my being poor; but evidently God never meant me to marry him. He died the day after we became engaged, and my life has been grey ever since."

"Tell me all about him."

"I daren't," said the woman, "even although fifteen years have gone since then, I daren't. But I am sure of this, lass: if you love a good lad and he loves you, it's better than making money, better even than buying back the old home that you love so. Not but what I mean to make money myself," she added.

"You make money?" cried Nancy. "I didn't know you had such a thing in your mind."

Mary Judson laughed a little bitterly.

"For one thing, I'm Yorkshire," she said, "and all Yorkshire people love brass; and for another— Well, you say you promised your father on his death-bed that you would buy back Trevanion Court—I promised my father something too."

"Yes?" queried the girl.

"Ay, I did. It wur on his death-bed too. You've heard about him, I expect."

"I've heard a good deal about him," replied Nancy.

"He was the cleverest man in Leeds," said the woman proudly. "He had more brains in his little finger than a lot of these millionaires have in their whole make-up. And he would have succeeded too if he had lived! Yes, he would! I know he was what the world calls unpractical; but he had big ideas! You had a legacy left you; ay, and I had a legacy left to me."

"What was it?" asked Nancy.

"To do what my father meant to do," replied the woman.

"He had a great idea, an idea that he had been working at for years, an idea that meant, if he succeeded, thousands upon thousands. You've heard that he had me taught chemistry?"

Nancy nodded.

"I've been working at it ever since he died, and I'm

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getting nearer to success—I am !” There was a fanatical light in the woman’s eyes, a light which might mean madness.

“My father was laughed at,” she went on ; “people said he was carried away by silly fancies and that he wasted his life in nonsense. I tell you this,” and Nancy felt the woman trembling as she caught her hand, “I am going to make his name honoured ; I am going to prove that he was the greatest man in Leeds. Eight *months* ! Why, eight *years* are nothing when you’ve got hold of something that’s worth doing.”

“Tell me all about it,” said the young girl eagerly.

“Hush ! there’s Sarah Ellen coming ; don’t speak about it while she’s here : it’s a secret.”

CHAPTER X

SYNTHETIC RUBBER

AN hour later, after Mary Judson had insisted upon Nancy warming herself by the fire which Sarah Ellen had prepared, and also partaking of a good meal, she led the way into the back-yard until she came to what was known as "the laboratory."

"I've never taken you in here?" she whispered as she took a curiously formed key from her pocket.

"No," replied Nancy.

"Nobody has been in here," she went on in low tones, "and now you are going to be the first." She unlocked the door as she spoke, and led the way into what appeared to Nancy like a fairly large mechanic's shop. Having closed the door and carefully locked it, she switched on the electric light. "Wait a minute," she said, and then going to each of the two windows, she saw to it that they were both closely shuttered.

Nancy looked curiously around her and saw what at first appeared to her like a mechanic's shop was in reality a large room fitted up with test tubes, retorts, and other impedimenta common to an experimental chemist's laboratory. There was also a bookcase filled with numerous volumes bearing on the science of chemistry. Many of the best known works in the world on that subject, as well as many which were entirely unknown to her, filled the shelves.

"I spend most of my time here," remarked Miss Judson.

Nancy nodded in assent. Many a night when she had been alone in the house she knew that Mary had locked herself in here, and had been curious to know what she

was doing. Naturally she had remembered what Mrs. Briggs had told her. Amos Judson, although the subject of a good deal of raillery, had been renowned as a chemist in the town, while Mary was said to have followed in her father's footsteps. More than one believed that she was a little mad, and that, like her father, she was following some *ignis fatuus* of her own imagination. More than once Nancy had pitied the poor woman, who, day after day, and night after night, toiled in this little room without company, and without, as far as she could see, any real result from her efforts. Of course, she had not sought to pry into her landlady's secrets; in any case it was not her affair. Miss Judson had proved to be kindly disposed towards her, and while she left her a great deal to herself, had made her feel that Laburnum Cottage was the best home she could find in Leeds.

"You've studied chemistry, haven't you?" asked Miss Judson after a long silence, during which she had followed Nancy's inquiring gaze.

"I was very fond of it both at school and at Cambridge," was Nancy's reply; "but of course I was only an amateur."

"Ay; you liked it, did you?"

"I was tremendously keen," replied Nancy, "and Professor Thorau used to say that I was his most promising student."

"It's the grandest and greatest subject in the world!" cried Miss Judson enthusiastically. "The future of the world, physically speaking, lies in chemistry. It's the basis of all progress, it lies at the back of everything—*everything*! Oh, I know what I am talking about, and I don't forget what we owe to physics and engineering; but chemistry is at the back of everything. Wireless now;—none of these wireless men can do without chemistry! Leeds city to-night is alight because of chemistry! It makes the commercial life of the country possible. You can see that, can't you?"

Mary Judson had become a changed woman since she entered the room. She was no longer the gaunt and some-

what unimaginative-looking creature which some thought her. Her eyes burned with a new light, her features had become mobile, her whole being was instinct with new life.

"My father built this place," she went on. "Some thought he was building a stable and he didn't disabuse their minds. He spent hundreds upon hundreds of pounds here, and as a consequence people laughed at him. For that matter, he sunk fortunes here in one way and another. He was a great man was my father, in spite of all they said. No, I admit he wasn't practical; he was too much of a genius to be practical. He was carried away by his own thoughts, and although he was a scientist at heart, he was so impulsive that he hadn't the patience to work out details. That was why he failed. Besides, before he brought one thing to perfection he went on to something else; that was why he accomplished nothing. Ay, if I had my father's knowledge I could do all he hoped to do; all the same, he's left a lot behind him."

"A lot behind him?" repeated Nancy.

"Yes. Do you see these books?" and she pointed to a shelf filled with volumes bound in black cloth. "Those are all his notebooks; he registered everything there; so that although there are a lot of things he didn't bring to perfection he left the material, as you may say, for perfecting what he begun?"

"And you are going to do this?" queried Nancy.

"I can't," replied the woman; "I don't know enough. But there is one thing I am going to do. I have spent months and months on it, and I am not going to rest till I have brought it to perfection. Listen! is that some one coming?"

Nancy obeyed her, but there was not a sound that broke the silence of the night. The fog which during the day had been little more than a thick grey mist, had now settled down into blackness. Not a breath of wind blew, and so, being some distance from the main thoroughfares of the city, not a sound reached them.

"I wouldn't for anyone to know about it for anything," said Miss Judson excitedly.

"Is it so important, then?" asked Nancy, humouring her.

"Important! Why, you don't know. You told me you needed ten thousand pounds to buy back your old home and you looked upon it as an impossible sum. Well," and her voice dropped into a whisper, "*that would be nothing if I succeeded in this!*"

"What is it?" asked Nancy.

"I am afraid to tell you," replied the woman, "afraid to tell anyone what I have discovered—— No, I am not telling the truth; it isn't what I've discovered, it's what my father discovered. But he died before he made his discovery perfect."

Nancy was silent. She felt sure that although in all the ordinary things of life Mary Judson was perfectly normal, in this she was carried away by her own feelings. After all, what could this poor lonely woman, who, as far as she could judge, had learnt only the elements of chemistry, do in face of the fact that the most learned men and the keenest brains in the world were at work? Still, her hopes made her happy, and she would be the last to try and destroy them. All the same, she was curious to know what was in her mind. What was this great scheme which meant such a vast fortune if successful?

Mary Judson's eyes were fixed on Nancy's face as though she would read the girl's soul. She seemed to be trying to make up her mind to something which to her was of infinite importance.

"Ay," she said presently, "I am like all women; I want some one to confide in. I can't do my best unless some one else knows as well as myself. Can I trust you?"

"I shouldn't if I had any doubts," replied Nancy with a laugh.

"It isn't that; and I'm rare'n fond of you too. My life has been a different thing since you came here to live; for although, as you may say, I haven't spent much time with you I have known you were in the house. You've

made me wake up in the morning with a new feeling, and as I have got to know you better I have fair got to love you. 'All the same, I have been afraid to tell you.'

"Then don't tell me."

"Oh, it's not because I don't believe in you; I do; and I expect that even if I told you you could do no harm with your knowledge. All the same, I'm afraid. You see, it means so much. Look here," and the woman's voice took on a new note of intensity, "if I'm successful you shall buy back your old home. Think of that!"

Nancy could not help smiling. The thought that Mary Judson could get ten thousand pounds seemed so remote, so far-fetched, that she could not regard it seriously. Nevertheless, as she watched the woman's eyes, and noted the tensivity of her voice, she was almost convinced in spite of herself.

"What is it?" she asked again. "No, don't tell me, if you are afraid."

"But I *must* tell you! I can't keep it to myself any longer. Night after night I lie in bed with this thing upon my mind until I almost feel I'm going mad. If I can make it real to you, it'll become more real to me. Besides, supposing anything were to happen to me! What would become of my father's work? Listen! *You've heard of rubber, haven't you?*" and her voice sunk to a whisper.

"Rubber?" repeated Nancy. "Every one has. During the last century or so it has revolutionized the commerce of the world."

"Yes, that's true," replied Mary. "I expect you've heard," she went on, "of the fortunes that have been lost and made in rubber."

Nancy sighed. One of her father's losses had been in this commodity. He had speculated when he had no right to speculate, and had lost every penny.

"The King of the Belgians—the old King of the Belgians—made millions out of it," went on the woman. "He aroused the imagination of the world. Rubber trees

were planted in a lot of hot countries and now there is a tremendous rubber trade."

"Of course I know that," replied Nancy, "every one does."

"Before the war it was two and nine and three shillings a pound—it's cheaper now; but it's still dear. Do you know anything about rubber?"

"A little," replied Nancy. "Professor Thoraud was very keen about it, and used to talk a great deal about synthetic rubber."

"Did he?" said the woman hoarsely. "Did he try to produce it?"

"He said it was impossible."

"No, surely he didn't say that?"

"You are right," replied Nancy, "he didn't say that. What he said was that it was impossible to make it on a commercial basis. But he said that synthetic rubber could be produced by chemistry, and that it would cost more than to grow it."

The woman laughed gleefully as though something amused her.

"Do you know rubber when you see it?" she asked. "I mean raw rubber, rubber in the sheet before it's vulcanized?"

"Certainly I do. As I told you, Professor Thoraud was very keen about it."

Miss Judson selected a key from a bunch she carried in her pocket and went to a box which she opened. From this box she took out a dark sheet of curiously smelling material and laid it before Nancy.

"What's that?" she asked.

"Rubber," replied the girl.

"What quality is it?"

"I should say it's of excellent quality," replied Nancy after putting it to some elementary tests. "I should say it's the best Para."

"My father made that!" announced Miss Judson proudly.

"Your father made it! . . ."

"I saw him make it," replied the woman; "saw the ingredients which he used. When those ingredients were put into the pan it was mush, pure mush; when it came out two hours later it was that—that!—Now listen, what does Para fetch in the market to-day? At the very cheapest eighteen-pence a pound. My father declared that it could be made in quantities at *fourpence* a pound; that is, *it can be manufactured at one and twopence a pound less than it can be grown!* Do you know how many thousand of tons of rubber are used in the world every year? Do you know how many pounds there are in a ton? Why think, at the lowest calculation that rubber can be made at a hundred pounds a ton cheaper than it can be grown."

"But surely——" Nancy began to protest.

"Oh yes, I know what you are going to say," broke in Miss Judson. "If he could make it like that, why didn't he go on making it? Of course, any fool can see that, and that's where the whole trouble lies. *But he made it!* He must have made at one time and another several hundredweights. Why, do you know this? He manufactured four motor tyres of the rubber he himself made synthetically, and those motor tyres ran for months on the streets of Leeds! Was it any wonder he thought he was going to make a fortune?"

"Why didn't he, then?" Nancy could not help asking.

"Ay yes, why didn't he? It was this way, Nancy, my dear. He could make it in samples—*now and then*; make a few pounds—*now and then*; yes, but when he came to make it on a commercial basis everything went wrong. When he tried to make it in large quantities it went into the pan mush, *and it came out mush!* Then he got taken ill, and before he was able to perfect his invention he died."

"And do you mean to tell me," Nancy cried with flashing eyes, for by this time she was almost as excited as Mary Judson, "that you saw this made?" and she pointed to the sheet the woman had placed before her.

"I saw it made!" replied Mary in a voice hoarse with

excitement. "I helped to make it! I was with my father when he bought the ingredients. I helped him to mix them. I helped him to place it in the iron pan. I helped him to screw down the cover; and two hours afterwards I helped him to take it out. And it was that, it was *that!* *THAT!*" and she pointed to the sheet of rubber with a trembling finger.

"And you are sure you were not deceived?"

"Deceived! Am I such a fool as that? Don't I know that two and two make four?"

"But it's such a tremendous thing!" cried the girl.

"You are sure your father didn't deceive you?"

"My father deceive me! *My father deceive me!* Why, he was the most honourable man that ever lived. Ask any man in Leeds who knew him, whether Amos Judson would deceive any man. And would he try to deceive his own daughter?"

Whatever might be Nancy's opinion with regard to Amos Judson's so-called invention, there could be but one opinion as to Mary Judson's conviction. She was as sure that the piece of rubber which lay before them, was made by her father in the way she had described as she was sure that she was standing there.

"You told me once," Mary went on, "that your father left you a legacy; a legacy which meant that you should buy back your old home. Well I told you that my father left *me* a legacy; and his legacy was that I should perfect what he had invented. It's no use as it is. A few pounds now and then, made seemingly by chance, is of no value; it must be worked out to a scientific certainty, and made in large quantities. Well, that has been my work ever since my father died. He left Laburnum Cottage and just enough for me to live on; but nothing else. For months and months I have lived here alone working at this thing, trying to find the one secret that should perfect it. I was so eager that I forgot to eat, and I did not get enough rest. That was how I became ill, and why I had to employ Sarah Ellen as a servant; that was what made me take you to

live with me. He didn't leave me enough to keep a servant, and I was almost in despair as to what to do. Your coming was providential, my dear. What you pay towards housekeeping is just enough to help me to carry on. Ay, and you've been *such* a comfort to me! If you were my own sister I couldn't love you more."

"And have you made any progress in your work?" asked Nancy.

The woman sighed. "Sometimes I think I have, and then again I know I haven't. *But I'll do it!*" and all the Yorkshire woman in her expressed itself as she uttered the words. "*Ay, I'll do it!*"

"And have you got the formula?"

"Yes, I've got it! I've got it written down, and I've got it *here!*" and she tapped her forehead significantly.

"May I see it?" asked Nancy.

"Nay, I can't go as far as that, even to you. Not that I don't trust you, Nancy my dear, I do; I would trust you with my own life. *But I darn't show you that!* All those other things," and she pointed to the long row of books which contained Amos Judson's notes, "you are welcome to. But *that!* No, I can't let you see *that!*"

Nancy was silent.

"Nay, don't be grieved, my dear," went on the woman; "but try to understand me. It's a sort of sacred charge to me, left by my father. He wanted to be first in the field, and believed he would be, right up to the last. Then just before he died he said: 'Mary lass, I've left you very little brass, but if you can put your finger upon the one thing that will make my discovery perfect, you will not only establish your father's honour in Leeds, but you will be one of the richest women in the country.'

"I care nowt about being rich," she added, and for a moment she lapsed into the vernacular. "I am Yorkshire, but I've mean sold my soul for brass; but the other thing is a trust, a sacred trust, and I mean to work until I die to establish my father's name in Leeds. Listen, I am sure I hear something!"

"No, there is nothing. You must have been mistaken."

"I suppose I must, but I'm so afraid that some one will find out my secret that I imagine all sorts of things. I am sure you will never tell anyone, will you, Nancy?"

"Certainly not," replied the girl. "What you have told me to-night shall be regarded as sacred, and no word of it shall ever pass my lips."

"Of course, I knew you wouldn't, and I would like to show you the formula. Perhaps I will some day." Her voice sank into a whisper again. "I keep it in the safe beside my bed," she went on. "Oh, I hope I shan't die before I finish my work. You see, I have got so far that it's only a little thing that's needed, and I may happen upon it at any moment."

She gazed at Nancy long and steadfastly, then a look like resolution came into her eyes, but she did not say another word. After a long silence she arose to her feet impatiently.

"Forgive me," she cried, "I can see you are shivering with the cold. I ought to be ashamed to have kept you here like this, but I've never spoken to anyone about this before, and I forgot myself. Let us go back into the house."

They had no sooner reached the back door than Sarah Ellen met them.

"There's a man i' t' room as is waiting to see Miss Nancy," she said.

"What man?" asked Mary Judson.

"Don't know. I never seed t' chap afore. He said he'd come on business."

"Perhaps your luck has changed," whispered Miss Judson to Nancy. "Perhaps it's some manufacturer who has come to tell you that he wants to use your designs."

"Oh, I do hope he has!" cried the girl.

A minute later she found her way into the room she had first entered, where a young man scarcely thirty years of age awaited her.

CHAPTER XI

JOHN SHAWCROSS'S OFFER

"YOU remember me, Miss Trevanion?"
"Yes, I remember you perfectly, Mr. Shawcross; I have reason to."

Mr. Shawcross looked at her questioningly.

"You are one of the very few men who has really admired my work," Nancy laughed; "it's no wonder, then, that I remember you."

"Yes, but I couldn't make use of it," replied the other, "and I don't know whether I can now; but I've come to discuss a proposal with you."

"That's interesting."

"It's this way," went on the man, "and you will forgive me if I mention purely personal matters. My father was a Leeds manufacturer, who was thought to be a successful man. He was old-fashioned; he wouldn't be up to date. When he died a few years ago he left his business in a bad way. Of course, the name is good still, and John Shawcross's memory is respected everywhere. I was his only son and every penny he owed has been paid. That's why my name has always stood good," he added a little proudly.

"I know it does," replied Nancy warmly. "I have heard you spoken of in the highest of terms."

The man's face flushed with pleasure, and he gave the girl a grateful look.

"Have you ever been inside the Manchester Exchange, Miss Trevanion?" he asked.

"Never," Nancy laughed; "I wouldn't dare."

"It's a sight on market days," went on Mr. Shawcross;

"but when I go there the first thing I look at is not the men who are there to make money, but at the inscription on the ceiling. 'A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches.' It's grand, isn't it?"

"Yes," Nancy assented, "it is."

"My father was with me when I saw it first, and he pointed it out to me. It was his favourite motto, and he told me to always live up to it. He died a poor man, and as I told you he left me terribly handicapped; but he made me promise before he died to pay up every penny. And I did. That's why I had to start from the beginning, as you may say; and I was sorely handicapped for want of capital. The Bank was willing to allow me a biggish overdraft, but I didn't want to do business that way; and although I have made a nice little connection, I've not been able to 'launch out,' as we say in Leeds. You understand me, don't you?"

"Perfectly," replied Nancy.

"My wife is just the same," he went on. "'Whatever we do, John,' she says, 'don't let's go into debt.' And I haven't. All the same, I have got ideas, and I have believed in them, I believe in them still. As you know, in the main I manufacture cretonnes and tapestries—all that sort of thing. But I couldn't get the designs I liked; everything offered to me was ordinary, commonplace. That was why, when you brought yours to me, I was what you may call struck with them. I said to myself, 'That young lady knows what's what; she's got taste and culture and imagination.' And I tell you frankly, after I'd examined them I believed that if they were worked up they would attract a big public. I felt sure there were thousands of people all over the country—people who love beautiful things, tasteful things—who would just rush at them if they could be produced at a marketable price. I as good as told you so, didn't I?"

"You told me you liked them," replied Nancy, "but you sent me away empty-handed."

"That was not my fault," replied John Shawcross. "I

could see in a minute that those designs would require new machinery, and new machinery would cost money; and I hadn't got the money. That was why I sent you away without doing any business. But I believe I can do business now, if you will agree with my proposal."

"Yes?" and Nancy looked at him with eager inquiry in her eyes.

"The truth is," went on the young manufacturer, "I came across a fellow some time ago who is pretty much of my mind—Dick Greenwood is his name, and he is as straight as any man who ever trod shoe-leather. He isn't rich, but all the same, he can command a tidy bit of money, and with what he's got, and what I've got, I believe we can make things hum. Anyhow, we've arranged to go into partnership if we can come to terms with you."

"Come to terms with me?" queried Nancy wonderingly. "What have I to do with it?"

"In a way you are a kind of keystone," laughed Shawcross. "You see, I am perfectly open and frank with you. You remember that you left a lot of your drawings with me, those drawings which I liked most and which fitted in with my ideas. Well, I showed them to Dick Greenwood, and I can tell you, he was just as much struck with them as I was; but seeing that new machinery would cost a lot of money he couldn't see how we could make use of them. However, we have discussed the matter again and again, and, as you may say, better discussed it. The result is that I am here."

"Yes, and I am pleased to see you."

"You haven't made any plans for the future, have you?" asked John Shawcross; "—you haven't fixed yourself up with anyone?"

Nancy shook her head.

"That's all right," and the man gave a sigh of relief. "You see, it's this way, Miss Trevanion," and he drew his chair a little closer to her. "If I may say so, your designs are out of the ordinary; they strike a new note;

they are not everybody's designs; and in a way they mean a new public. Do you follow me?"

"I think I do," replied the girl, "but will you explain yourself a little more fully?"

"I want to make everything plain to you," went on Shawcross. "If Dick Greenwood and I embark on the thing we have in our minds, we practically risk our all, so that if we fail it will mean calamity for us. But we don't think we shall. We believe that we can create a public for this kind of thing, but if we take it on we want the exclusive rights in it."

"I am afraid I don't follow you now," and Nancy looked bewildered. "There is no such thing as exclusive rights in designing."

"In a way that's true, and in a way it isn't. You see, as I said, you have set out on entirely new and original lines, and if we took it on we should want to tell the big houses in London, and in other great cities, that we had the exclusive right in your work. We should want an engagement from you that you wouldn't produce a design for any other firm."

The girl's heart beat rapidly; this was indeed praise—praise which she had never dreamed of. It made her feel that her work was of real value.

"That is your proposal, then?" she managed to say.

"It's a part of it," replied Shawcross, "but it's only a part of it."

"What's the other part of it, then?"

"The other part may not be even as pleasant as the first part. It's this way. As I told you, both Dick Greenwood and I are risking our all and we don't mean to run our business on borrowed money. Now it may be months, years, before we can create a sale for this special line of goods, and in the meanwhile there will be a lot of expense that must be met. You can see that, can't you?"

"Yes, I see that."

"For that reason we may not be able to pay you anything like a salary for a long time."

"Then what I understand is," replied Nancy, "that you want me to engage myself to work for you for a certain time for a negligible salary?"

"In a way 'tis, and in a way 'tisn't. I am trying to be absolutely straight with you, Miss Trevanion, and I want to paint everything in its true colours. We do want the exclusive rights in your productions; we want to have the exclusive right of everything you've done since you've been in Leeds, as well as what you will produce, say during the next two years. I know that's a tall order, that's why I've tried to make everything plain to you. Dick Greenwood and I have talked it out a hundred times, and we can't see our way to promise you more than a hundred a year for the first year, or for perhaps the second year."

Nancy looked thoughtful. She was paying Miss Mary Judson at the rate of two pounds a week for her board and lodgings, and she reflected that great inroads had been made upon the three hundred pounds she had brought with her.

"I put that bad bit first," went on Shawcross, "because I wanted you to hear it first. I know it's a beggarly pay and I hesitated a long time before I mentioned it to you. But there is another side. The moment we succeed you shall participate in our success."

"That's very vague."

"Yes, I know it is, but I'll try to say something that isn't vague. We'll promise you a hundred a year to start with, but if at the end of the year we make a thousand pounds profit, a tenth of it shall go to you. Here, I have drawn up a little form of agreement which I have brought with me. Will you read it? You see, I suggested a sliding scale by which you shall participate in our success, providing we do have success. We have faith in you and your work; have you enough faith in yourself and in your work to trust to our suggestion?"

Nancy read the paper carefully. She saw that it evidenced all the shrewd and cautious characteristics of the Yorkshireman, nevertheless, it seemed perfectly just.

The agreement was to stand for two years, after which everything should be reconsidered. During those two years, however, she was to pledge herself to work exclusively for Messrs. Shawcross & Greenwood. She was to have a minimum salary of a hundred a year, but if the firm was successful that salary would increase *pro rata* to the profits made. If, for example, the profits of the firm were four thousand pounds for the first year, she should receive a salary of five hundred pounds.

"Well, what do you say?" asked Mr. Shawcross after a long silence.

The girl remained silent. If she had lived at home she would have jumped at a far poorer offer; but she had to pay two pounds a week to Miss Mary Judson which would swallow up every penny of her earnings. She wouldn't have a penny for clothes, or pocket money; thus the offer was indeed pitiable. She remembered that her father had paid thousands of pounds for her education, and yet although she had passed through an expensive school with distinction, and obtained valuable certificates amounting to a first-class degree in an old University, her salary for two years would not be enough to keep her. It was terribly humiliating, and she felt like refusing it outright. Besides, what was to become of all her fond dreams? She had set out from home with the idea of buying back Trevanion Court, and her hopes of doing that had now fallen to zero.

And yet she could not refuse. She remembered that for eight months she had scarcely earned a penny. During that eight months it had all been outgo and no income, and, as far as she could see, she had no other prospects for the future. If she refused Mr. Shawcross's offer it might be that she would have to spend every farthing of the amount she had saved from the wreck at Trevanion Court and be no nearer her hopes. At any rate, a hundred a year would pay for bread and cheese and a roof over her head; it would enable her to save a large part of what remained to her, and thus give her a longer time to gain a footing.

Besides, supposing the firm should succeed, supposing her designs became famous, she would participate in that success, and then, at the end of two years, supposing she decided to leave Shawcross & Greenwood, she would be able to make her own terms with large manufacturers.

"Well, what do you say?" queried Mr. Shawcross again, after another long silence.

"Of course, I am obliged to you for your offer," replied the girl, "and——" then she remembered what Elijah Briggs had said to her on the day she had taken up her abode with Miss Judson. "If ever you need my help or advice, lass, be sure to come to me," he had urged her.

"You accept our offer, then?" said Mr. Shawcross, who was eagerly watching Nancy's face.

"Do you want to know at once?"

"I do. I want to begin right away. As I told you, I have faith in you and in your ability, and the sooner we begin the better."

"I will let you know in forty-eight hours from now," replied the girl. "Will that do?"

"But why wait? You told me you weren't pledged to anyone else."

"I know, but signing that agreement means pledging myself for two years at a salary on which I cannot live. I am frightfully obliged to you, but you see, it's all new to me; you've taken weeks in coming to a conclusion. You say you felt it a big thing; it's also a big thing to me, and I cannot decide in a moment. I must seek advice."

"But you won't let anyone know our plans?" asked John Shawcross anxiously.

"I'll tell nothing but what I am obliged to tell," replied the girl, "and what I say will be in confidence."

"Who are you going to ask for advice?"

"Mr. Elijah Briggs."

John Shawcross looked thoughtful for a time. "Elijah Briggs is a straight man," he said, "and his word is his

bond. If he will promise to say nothing, you may tell him the outlines of what I've told you ; but mind, everything must be in confidence."

Directly Mr. Shawcross had gone Nancy went to the telephone and rung up Woodroyd.

"Yes, what is it ? " It was Elijah Briggs who spoke.

"It's I, Nancy Trevanion."

"Ay, Nancy, my dear," said the Yorkshireman, "your voice sounds like music over the telephone. Where have you been this long time ? Why haven't you been up to see us ? "

"I want to see you to-morrow night, anyhow," replied Nancy.

"Ay, I am sorry I can't see you to-morrow night. I have a long-standing engagement ; in fact, to-morrow and the day after I am just crowded out with things. Is it something particular ? "

"Very particular," replied Nancy.

"Then I will tell you what I'll do. I'll send a car for you now. I shall be free for the next two hours and we will arrange it that way."

Less than an hour later Nancy had arrived at Woodroyd, where she received a hearty greeting from the Briggs family. They were all together in the drawing-room when she made her appearance, and three out of the four of them rushed eagerly towards her, both Jessie and Mrs. Briggs repeating again and again how glad they were that she had come, and reproaching her with great vehemence for neglecting them. Elijah Briggs, who had evidently told them of her telephonic communication, looked at her wonderingly and seemed anxious to know what had brought her there that night.

"As you know, Nancy lass," he told her, "we are always glad to see you, and are vexed with you because you come here so little. But what's the matter ? You look excited and anxious. Has anything gone wrong ? "

"No," replied Nancy, "nothing is wrong, but I wanted to see you particularly ; I want your advice."

"Something to do with business?"

"Yes, and if I may, I should like to see you alone. It's not because I wouldn't tell anyone here everything, but I have others to consider besides myself."

During this time Ben had scarcely spoken; evidently he was as excited at Nancy's arrival as the others were, and listened eagerly to every word that was said. His usually florid face had become somewhat pale too, and it would appear from his twitching lips that he was in a state of excitement.

"But you mustn't spend all your time alone with father," cried Jessie. "We can't allow that."

"Will your business take long, Nancy lass?" asked Elijah Briggs.

"No, I dare say not," replied Nancy. "Of course, you may think it a very small matter, but it's very important to me."

"Ay, we'll get through it in a few minutes, I dare say," said the Yorkshireman. "Is there a fire in the study, mother?"

"Ay, there is. You told me Mr. Barraclough was coming to-night, and so I had it lit for you."

"So you did. We'll go in there, then, and when we've done our business we'll come back here again until Jim Barraclough comes. And we're going to keep you till late too, Nancy. You're not going back to Laburnum Cottage until midnight. I'll tell Dixon to hold himself in readiness to drive you home. Where are you off to, Ben?"

"I think I'm going out for the evening," replied Ben a little nervously, whereupon he hurriedly left the room, followed by Mr. Briggs and Nancy, who made their way into the study.

CHAPTER XII

BEN BRIGGS'S TELEPHONE MESSAGE

IT has been mentioned earlier in these pages that Ben Briggs's friends had a saying that "Ben Briggs always got what he wanted." Perhaps this was because he had been more than usually fortunate in carrying out his schemes. He was a dogged, persevering fellow who, true to his Yorkshire character, never gave up trying to obtain what he determined to get. He was a short, stoutly built young man with a square determined jaw, and hard steely eyes. Not evilly dispositioned by any means, although some said that Ben could be as "cruel as hell to anyone who thwarted him."

This being so, no one will be surprised that he had not given up hopes of wedding Nancy. As he had told her, before she took up her residence with Miss Mary Judson, he had never thought about another girl as he thought about her, and after she left the house he was, as his mother declared, "as gloomy as a bear with a sore head."

It was true that Nancy had given him no encouragement whatever, but this did not affect Ben's determination.

"I have a way of getting what I want," he reflected, "and I'm going to get her."

True to his Yorkshire character, moreover, he was intensely practical. In the past he had succeeded in his desires because he had calculated on every contingency, and never left a stone unturned. Shrewd and far-seeing, he saw, or thought he saw, the kind of girl Nancy was. If he was strong willed and determined, so was she; and he felt sure that if he were to carry out his wishes con-

cerning her it would not do for him to stand idly by and wait on events.

That was why he must follow events closely and be cognisant of everything that happened to her. He was rejoiced beyond measure that she had not succeeded in obtaining a position as a designer. Ben, like other manufacturers, knew of Nancy's drawings, and while admitting their excellence, he had declared more than once that there was nothing in them from a business point of view.

"I hope she'll fail and continue to fail," he kept saying to himself; "the more she fails the better chance for me. I know she wants to buy back her old home, and the more she's disappointed in her hopes the more she will remember what I said to her. Then, when the time is ripe, and she sees that there is no way of fulfilling her hopes except through me, I'll speak again."

Shortly after Nancy had taken up her abode in Laburnum Cottage Ben came across Sarah Ellen, Miss Mary Judson's maid-of-all-work. Ben had known Sarah Ellen for some years. She had at one time worked in one of his father's mills, but had been obliged to give up on account of ill-health. Sarah Ellen was a taciturn, uninteresting woman of something over thirty years of age, and few would suspect that she had any romance in her nature. But Ben knew otherwise. She was, as a matter of fact, in love with one of his father's mill-hands, whose great ambition was to give up work at the factory and to possess a little grocer's shop; but as his wages were small and he had no capital to carry out his desires, there seemed but few prospects for him in that direction. Ezra Day looked upon Sarah Ellen as his future wife, but he determined never to marry until he could, as he termed it, "find brass eno' to start a little shop in Dingle Street."

"Hello, Sarah Ellen! How are you getting on?" asked Ben when they met.

"Nobbut middlin'."

"How's that? Don't you get on well with Miss Judson?"

"Well eno', but she's no brass, and can only give me a poor wage."

"Well, get another place; servants are at a premium."

"Ay, but where can I go? I am noan fitted for a big 'ouse. I enjoy very poor 'ealth. Besides, I don't want to leave Miss Judson; she's varry good to me. Ay, Mester Ben, you know what I want."

"Yes, I know," replied Ben, "and Ezra isn't saving money very fast."

"Nay, he isn't, and 'ee's a bit gawmless. I'm feared 'ee'll never save eno' for us to git wed. It taks a sight of brass to start a shop."

"How much?"

"Two hundred pounds," Sarah Ellen replied in woe-begotten tones. "At the rate Ezra's going 'ee'll tak a matter, o' ten year to do that. I s'poase you couldn't 'elp us in any way, Mester Ben?"

"I don't know; perhaps I might," was Ben's guarded reply. "Would you be willing to do something for me if I saw it in my way to help you?"

"Ay, wouldn't I!" and a flash of colour came into her pale, pasty face. "But what do you want me to do for you?"

"What do you think of the young lady who has come to live with you?" asked Ben.

"Ay, she's a grand lass; a bit 'igh in 'er notions, but still a grand lass."

"Do you know anything about her?" asked Ben.

"I know she wur staying at your 'ouse afore she come to us," replied Sarah Ellen. "Your sister Jessie came wi' 'er. But I'm feared she'll never do what she wants to do."

"What do you know about what she wants to do?"

"I'm noan going to let on, Mester Ben."

Ben looked at the woman keenly and drew his conclusions.

"You've heard her tell Miss Judson what she wants to do, eh?" asked Ben. "Oh, you needn't be afraid to speak, I know."

"Ay, but she'll never do it," said Sarah Ellen. "She may get a job as a designer, but as for getting all that brass, she'll ne'er do it."

Ben was silent for a few seconds and then seemed to come to a certain determination.

"Look here, Sarah Ellen," he said, "you see her every day, don't you?"

"Ay, of course I do."

"You hear all that takes place between her and Miss Judson, I suppose?"

"It's possible."

"Well now, I want you to do something for me, and then perhaps I'll be able to do something for Ezra."

"What?" asked the woman eagerly.

"If ever you find anything out about Miss Trevanion—I don't say there will be anything—but if ever you do, will you let me know?"

"You've nowt against her, have yo'?"

"Anything against her? By Gum, no!" There was such emphasis in his protestation that Sarah Ellen looked at him curiously.

"Are you in love wi' 'er?" she asked.

"I don't say I am not," replied Ben after another silence; "anyhow, if you do what I tell you, perhaps I'll help Ezra to find that money."

"But what do you want?"

Whereupon Ben spoke very earnestly to the woman.

"I don't imagine anything will come of it," reflected Ben after he had left her, "but it's always well to know everything, and it may be that at some time she'll be able to tell me something useful."

On the night Nancy had telephoned to Mr. Briggs immediately after receiving her visit from John Shawcross, Ben had decided to go to his club, but on his father coming into the room and saying that he had just sent the car for Nancy, as she wished to see him, he decided to stay at home.

"What can Nancy want to see you about?" asked Mrs. Briggs wonderingly.

"She says it's important," was her husband's reply; "she's just telephoned to say so."

"Well, we'll be right glad to see her, the house has never been the same since she left it," Mrs. Briggs asserted. "How long will she be, Elijah?"

"Not more than half an hour. Ay, I'll be glad to see her. She's a rare bright lass."

He had scarcely spoken when a servant entered the room, saying that some one on the telephone wanted to speak to Mr. Ben.

"Did he say who he was?" asked Ben.

"No, sir," replied the girl, "and it's not a he at all; it's some woman."

"It'll be some lady friend of yours," laughed Jessie.

"Please, miss, I don't think it's a lady," replied the girl; "it's a woman who talks broad Yorkshire."

A bright light came into Ben's eyes at this, and he rushed to the little cubicle where the telephone was fixed.

"Is that you, Mester Ben?—Mester Ben Briggs, I mean."

"Yes. Who are you?"

"Don't you recognize the voice?"

"Is it Sarah Ellen?"

"Ay, it is an' all. I thought you ought to know and so I rung you up."

"Thought I ought to know what?"

"Miss Nancy Trevanion will be up at your house soon."

"I know that; my father's just told us."

"Weel, she has things to tell him."

"What has she to tell him?"

"I don't rightly know, but important things. You told me to tell you if I found out anything, so I thought I would ring you up. *There is summat else too, something very particular.*"

"What is it?"

"Wait a minute, she's just coming down the stairs ready to start. When she's gone I'll tell you everything, there'll be nobody in the house but me then. Miss Mary

has gone out into the laboratory again. It's very particular," she added.

After this there was silence for more than a minute while Ben waited with the receiver at his ear, more than ordinarily impatient. He knew by the excitement in Sarah Ellen's voice that there was something of importance in her mind, and he wondered what it might be. When he had seen her last, about a week before, he was disappointed that Sarah Ellen had nothing to tell him, and he had threatened her that he would not help her towards getting married unless she was of greater service to him.

"I told you to miss nothing," he had told her, "to note every letter she receives and to remember every scrap of conversation."

Whereupon Sarah Ellen had protested that nothing had escaped her, but that she would double her vigilance.

"Are you still there, Mester Ben?"

"Yes, I am here."

"She's just gone, and there is nobbut me in t' 'ouse. I've found out things:"

- "What have you found out?"

"Nearly two hours ago Miss Mary asked the Trevanion lass to go wi' 'er to the laboratory. That's the right word, isn't it?"

"Yes, I know what you mean. Go on."

"Weel, remembering what you said, I went after them and listened at t' door. Miss Mary told 'er what she'd been doing there ever since owd Amos deed. She says she's discovered summat."

"Discovered something? What do you mean by that?"

"I couldn't rightly mak out, but t'was summat about rubber."

"Rubber?"

"Ay, rubber. She said she'd found out 'ow to mak it. She told the Trevanion lass that you couldn't buy rubber in t' market less nor one and six a pound and that she could mak it for fourpence."

"Make rubber? I don't understand."

"Nay, nor I. You see, I wur listening at t' keyhole and I couldn't catch all they said, but I 'eerd something about lynfetic rubber or summat like that."

"Lynfetic? Was it synthetic?"

"Yes, that wur it," cried Sarah Ellen excitedly, "synthetic."

Ben became thoughtful. He knew that many attempts to make synthetic rubber had been made; indeed, he had not so long before put some money into a concern which professed to do this. But the concern had turned out a failure, and Ben had, much to his chagrin, lost everything.

"Miss Mary was terribly excited about it," went on Sarah Ellen; "she said there wur millions in it, and that when the thing wur complete she would buy back Miss Nancy's old 'ome."

Ben laughed incredulously. "I've heard that story before, Sarah Ellen," he said, "and there's nothing in it."

"'Eerd it afore? Why, Miss Mary told the Trevanion lass that it was a dead secret."

"Yes, I dare say, but there is nothing new in synthetic rubber. I've heard about it from other quarters. Why, I—— But there, there's nothing in it."

"But there is summat in it!" protested Sarah Ellen.

"She took some stuff out of a box and showed it to the Cornish lass, and she said, 'What is it?' and the Cornish lass said, 'It's rubber.' 'What sort of quality is it?' asked Miss Mary. 'It's good quality,' said t'other, 'I should call it best Para rubber.' Then Miss Mary said, 'I 'elped to mak it, I 'elped to buy the things from the chemist, I 'elped to put it in the pan, and I wur there when it wur took out; and it's *this*.'"

"You're sure?" asked Ben.

"Ay, I'm sure. Miss Nancy seemed sort of sceptical at first, but afterwards she got all excited like. The two talked for a long time."

"What about?" asked Ben.

"I am noan quite sure, but it seemed as though there wur summat which Miss Mary wasn't certain about. Then the Trevanion lass asked her whether she had something called a formula—I think that's the word."

"Yes, formula, that's all right."

"Well, Miss Mary wouldn't let her have it, she said it wur too precious like."

Ben was silent a little time.

"Thank you for telling me, Sarah Ellen," he said, "but there's nothing in it."

"Weel, I've told yo' anyhow. But that isn't all. A man called John Shawcross came to see 'er, what for I can't rightly say."

"Didn't you listen?"

"I tried to, but Miss Mary was about, and if she'd caught me she'd 'ave sacked me. Anyhow, directly after 'ee'd gone she went to the telephone and rung up your 'ouse. There, Miss Mary's coming back and I can't talk no more."

Ben hung up the receiver in a very thoughtful frame of mind. If there was any truth in what Sarah Ellen had told him, there might be trouble ahead. Not that he paid much attention to this synthetic rubber business; it had been a dream among chemists for more than twenty years. For that matter the man who persuaded him to put up his money had proved as conclusively as it was possible to prove anything, that he had made it, but it had come to nothing, and he, like many others, had been the laughing-stock of his friends.

But he couldn't afford to discard the idea altogether. He remembered that old Amos Judson was regarded by many as a man of genius, and it was quite possible that he had succeeded where others had failed. After all, rubber consisted of certain ingredients, and what those ingredients were chemists had fully set forth. It seemed quite reasonable, therefore, that those ingredients might and eventually manufactured as a paying

proposition. It was easily conceived, too, that Miss Mary Judson might complete what her father had begun. If old Amos had left her his formula, even although he had not quite made the thing perfect, Mary with her keen mind and dogged persistence, added to her well-known knowledge of chemistry, might succeed. It was known too that she had conceived a great affection for Nancy, and this being so, nothing was more possible than that, if her invention was a success, she would go shares with her friend.

Of course, Sarah Ellen's narrative was confused and unconvincing, and he was afraid to ask questions. No one knew who might be listening at the telephone exchange.

Then there was the fact that John Shawcross had visited her. He knew John Shawcross slightly and wondered why he should come to see Nancy; evidently it was about something concerning which she wanted his father's advice.

When Ben returned to the drawing-room, therefore, he was more than ordinarily thoughtful. He was anxious to see Nancy, but more anxious concerning the purport of her visit, for he felt it might be a deciding factor in his own future.

When Nancy arrived he looked at her eagerly, hoping that she might, in some way, reveal to him her purpose in coming. But he learnt nothing. He saw that her eyes sparkled with more than usual brilliance, knew by her every movement that she was greatly excited; but he quickly gathered that he was to be kept in the dark. He knew that his father would not breathe a word as to what she had told him, and although he longed to ask questions concerning her experiences, that night he dared not do so.

Ben felt more in love with her than ever as he watched her. What a glorious creature she was! What a wonderful apple-blossom complexion, what vivacity, what charm! How men would envy him when at length he won her as his wife. For he would win her; of that he was more

determined than ever. He would be true to his reputation that he always got what he wanted. Besides, what would life be to him without her? But he could not win her by sitting supinely and doing nothing; he must act, and he must act quickly. But what could he do?

He listened to the pleasantries which passed between Jessie and Nancy, and then heard his father say that he should not allow the latter to return to Laburnum Cottage till midnight.

A thought flashed through his mind upon which he would act immediately. That was why, when he saw his father on the point of taking Nancy into the study, he left the room and prepared to go out.

Going into the yard at the back of the house he entered the garage and took out a little two-seater car which he kept for his own special use. This he drove as rapidly as he could through the murky streets of Leeds until he reached Laburnum Cottage; then, parking the car, he reconnoitred the house. There was no light in either of the front rooms, so he concluded that Mary Judson was not in. Evidently Sarah Ellen was, however, for the kitchen was brightly lit. He sought admission immediately.

"Ay, Mester Ben, you fair gave me a start. Is owt wrong?"

"I want to talk with you about what you said on the 'phone," was his reply. "Where is Miss Judson?"

"She's locked herself in the laboratory. She went there directly that Trevanion lass left for your 'ouse; she seemed specially excited. I expect she'll stay there till midnight now; she often does when she's keen."

For the next half an hour the two talked eagerly. Ben catechized Sarah Ellen about what she had heard in the laboratory; made her repeat again and again every scrap of conversation between the two women. On one thing he was especially insistent.

"You say that Miss Judson seemed *certain* about the invention?"

"Ay, she wur, and yet she wur noan satisfied. She said her father had made it in small quantities, but could never make a lot on it at a time."

"You are sure of that?"

"Ay, I am sure."

"And you are sure that Miss Trevanion said that what she saw was rubber?"

"Ay, I've told you so again and again."

"You told me that she said it was nearly perfect?"

"Ay, that's it; and she seemed to be sure that she nearly got it right. She said that sometimes it went in the pan mush and came out mush, but there wur times when it went in mush and came out rubber."

"Sarah Ellen," asked Ben, "do you know where that formula is?"

Sarah Ellen shook her head. "Nay," she replied, "I 'eerd something about a safe, but I'm noan sure."

Presently Ben took out his money case and from it extracted a five-pound note.

"Here is something on account, Sarah Ellen," he said, "and if you do what I tell you, and if I succeed in what I've in my mind, you shall have fifty of them."

"Five fifties is two hundred and fifty!" gasped Sarah Ellen. "*E-e-h!*" Cupidity shone from her eyes.

"Yes. But you must be very careful; those women must suspect nothing. You must never let them know that you are watching them; but you *must* watch them; watch everything and report everything to me."

"I'm noan doing wrong, am I?"

"No, you are doing no wrong, and no harm can possibly come to you. Remember that."

When Ben left the house at the end of half an hour he headed his car towards the centre of the city, and having driven through Boar Lane and Briggate, presently turned along the Dewsbury Road. The night was still dark and foggy, and the traffic was frequently held up; but Ben, who knew every inch of the way, seemed to find no difficulty in driving. At length, having passed through the densest

part of the town, he came to a row of shabby-looking cottages. Here he stopped and looked carefully at the numbers on the fanlights over the doors. Knocking at one of the doors, he waited impatiently; evidently Ben had something serious in his mind. A faded-looking woman, apparently about thirty years of age, presently appeared.

"Is Mr. Langham in?"

"Ay, he is."

"Is he alone?"

"Ay, there's nobody but him and me. Coom this way."

He followed the woman along a narrow, oilcloth-covered passage and presently entered a typical Yorkshire cottage kitchen. Seated on what is generally known in the North of England as a smoker's chair, he saw, sitting before a cheerful fire, a man who might be five years older than himself. He was pale-faced, somewhat unhealthy-looking fellow with flabby cheeks, and small, shifty-looking eyes. Shabbily dressed and evidently down at heels, he looked like a bookmaker's tout. And yet not altogether. There was something out of the ordinary about him. His shifty-looking eyes suggested cunning; and more than cunning; they spoke of intelligence of a high order, while the brow which overhung them was broad and well developed.

"Mr. Ben Briggs!" he exclaimed in a somewhat toneless voice, as he rose to his feet.

"Yes, Langham. I have come to have a chat with you."

The other gave Ben a searching look. There was both fear and cupidity in his eyes. Evidently he was wondering why Ben had come to him, wondering too whether he could make anything out of him.

CHAPTER XIII

WILFRED LANGHAM

THE woman who had watched the meeting of the two men placed a chair for Ben and then, taking another for herself, drew it close to the fire. It would appear that she intended being present at the interview.

"I would like to speak to you alone, Langham," said Ben meaningly.

"I have no secrets from my wife," was Langham's reply.

"But I may have. You and I can talk more freely if we are alone."

The woman gave a fearful look, first at her husband and then at Ben.

"Why can't I stay?" she asked. "I shall do no harm."

"It'll be to your advantage, Langham, if we are alone," Ben persisted.

The woman gave a second glance at her husband and then prepared to leave the room. On reaching the door, however, she beckoned him to her side.

"Don't you be a fool, Wilfred," she whispered, "and don't promise him owt."

"I'll be careful, Evelyn," Langham assured her, and closed the door after her.

"Well, how have you been getting on, Langham?" asked Ben when the two were left alone together. "Have you got any further?"

"Not a bit."

"Do you say that you've not got any nearer to the solution of your difficulties?"

The man shook his head.

"Look here, Langham, have you been straight with me?"

"Of course I have. Why shouldn't I be?"

"There are a plenty of reasons why you should," and Ben's voice became a little truculent; "there are none why you shouldn't; but I have had my doubts. The whole thing is fishy."

"What's fishy?"

"More than two years ago," Ben said quietly, "you came to me and showed me what you said was rubber. You told me you had made it yourself; told me a long story about the difficulties you had had. You declared that you had overcome all those difficulties and that you could make it as often as you liked. That's true, isn't it?"

"Yes," replied Langham; "that's true."

"You also said that what you wanted was money to start manufacturing on a business basis, and that there was a huge fortune in it."

The other nodded his head.

"Well," went on Ben, "I got hold of a rubber manufacturer who tested the stuff and he also declared it was rubber. After making what we thought was sufficient inquiry, he and I, and some others put up money and formed a little company; but never since then have you made it again. What's the meaning of it?"

"I've told you again and again," replied the man.

"Yes, you've told us; but I, for one, am not satisfied. Indeed," went on Ben, looking somewhat threateningly at the other, "I wonder whether I oughtn't to sue you for obtaining money under false pretences. Every penny which has been put up has gone, and you've nothing to show for it."

"Isn't it a waste of time to go into that again, Mr. Briggs? Everything has been done square and above-board. Why, you yourself saw the rubber I'd made; you submitted it to all sorts of tests; you employed a

professor of chemistry at the college ; you used it to make rubber soles with, and you declared it to be O.K. Whatever I am, I am not a rogue."

"But where is all the money gone?"

"You know as well as I do. It was spent on making experiments and getting plant."

"And have you tried since?"

"Tried since!" and the man's face worked curiously. "Tried since! I've worked night and day at it; I've been nearly mad. I believed every word I told you, and no one was more surprised than I when the thing didn't come off."

"And you really believe that you made rubber?"

"I am sure of it," replied the man doggedly, "as sure as I am in this room now."

"Then why can't you make it again?"

"I don't know. Before Heaven, Mr. Briggs, I don't know! I've tried and I've tried and I've better tried. I've thought of everything I can think of; I've made thousands of experiments; but they've all come to naught."

"Then look here," asked Ben, "do you really think it *can* be made?"

"It can be made right enough. What's been done once can be done again."

"But can it be made on a commercial basis?"

"I don't know," replied the man, "after all that's taken place I daren't say."

"It's been said that old Amos Judson made it before he died."

"Do you think I don't know that? Why, it was he who taught me all I know."

"You never told me that."

"It's true, anyhow. But he didn't know I knew anything. He kept me as a sort of assistant at Laburnum Cottage. I was with him two years, and it was while I was there that I learnt things. But Amos Judson never made it—that is, proper; there was always something wanting, and I believed I had found it out. I must have

found it out or I couldn't do what I did. That stuff I showed you, Mr. Briggs, was genuine stuff, and I thought my fortune was made. Oh, you needn't look at me in that ugly way; I was square with you as I've been square with everybody else. I tell you, it's only a little thing that's wanted, but it's that little thing I can't find out. If I could—oh, if only I could!" Langham began to pace the room nervously.

For some time there was a silence between them. Ben Briggs, after watching the agitated face and restless condition of the other, became convinced in spite of himself, that he had told him the truth. Besides, as he reflected on the events which had taken place since his first associations with him, he could not see how it could be in Langham's interests to deceive him. The man bore the hall mark of truth, and there were no evidences that he had, in any way, misappropriated the money with which he had been entrusted. The man had every reason to make the thing a success; he had no interest in allowing it to be a failure. Indeed, the more he thought about it the more he realized that it was his own fault that the money was lost. And yet he could not understand it. As Langham had said, if rubber could be synthetically made once, it could be made *ad infinitum*.

"Look here," cried Ben excitedly, "I have good reason to believe that Miss Mary Judson has made rubber."

Langham stopped in his walk. "'By Gum!'" he whispered hoarsely, "I never thought of that!"

"Do you know anything about her?"

"I only know that she is as keen as mustard," replied the man, "and of course when old Amos died he would leave a record of all he'd found out. He'd been at this for fifteen years; he dropped it a dozen times only to take it up again. I believe it was because he thought I was finding out some of his secrets that he sacked me, and— Yes, he would have told his daughter all he knew."

"You think, then, that she may have found out?"

Langham was silent for some time, and then went on:

"She's a clever woman, and was as keen as mustard on chemistry. She believed in her father, too. She might—she *might*!"

"You said just now you did not believe it could be made on a commercial basis," went on Ben.

"I said so, but I don't know. It may be there is only a little thing that stands between me and success. If that's true, then anything is possible."

"Then it could be made on a commercial basis?"

"Look here, Mr. Briggs, as I told you years ago, the cost of the various things which went to make the rubber I showed to you was only twopence a pound. Well now, you can make it up for yourself. Commercial basis! Ay, if that little thing can be found out there are millions in it, millions! But can it? I am at it every night now. As you know I work at the mill through the day, and every night I am at this job, and I'm no nearer to it now than I was when I confessed my failure to you; nay, I'm not so near, for I don't seem to be able to make it at all now. Ay, if I only could!"

Ben saw the perspiration standing in thick beads upon the man's brow; evidently he was greatly excited.

"What would you give if you could find out?" asked Ben.

"Give! I'd give ten years of my life."

"I'm going to tell you something more," said Ben presently. "Mind, I vouch for nothing, but I believe it's the truth. I've been told that Miss Judson is where you were two years ago. She's made it again and again, but she can't make it always. What baffled you has baffled her; there is some little thing wanting, and what it is she doesn't know."

Langham's shifty-looking little eyes seemed to become large and protruding as he heard this, and Ben saw that his hands were trembling like aspen leaves.

"Ay, if I could only be sure of what she *does* know," he said in a hoarse whisper.

"How much do you know about chemistry?" asked Ben.

"I wur always interested in it," replied the man, "and ever since I was fifteen I've been studying it. People called me a sort of genius, and as soon as I was able I went to classes at the Yorkshire College. Professors there thought a lot of me. That's why, when I heerd as how owd Amos Judson wanted some one to help him, I went to him almost without any wages."

"And do you know as much about chemistry as Miss Judson?"

"I'll swear I do, and a lot more. But she'll have her father's papers, and she has the finest chemical apparatus in Leeds. If I could only get hold of those papers——"

"Why not?" asked Ben.

"What do you mean?" retorted the man suspiciously.

"What's to hinder you from going to Miss Judson and offering to help her? She knew you years ago and might be glad to do it."

The thought seemed to strike the man as something new. He stood staring into the fire for some minutes without speaking a word.

"Ay, if I only could," he murmured to himself.

"Now look here," said Ben, rising to his feet, "as I told you I am not convinced that you have acted straight with me, neither are the others who have put up money. I've had a job to keep them from prosecuting you and I don't say but what I've been tempted myself. More than that, I don't like the idea of some one else forestalling me. Why can't you pick Miss Judson's brains?"

The man did not answer; he kept staring into the fire.

"If you get ahead of her," went on Ben, "I'll do the handsome thing. I'll come down with a good round sum of ready money and we'll keep to the old agreement."

"And if I can't?" asked the man.

"I don't like threatening," was Ben's reply, "but I never allow anyone to trick me. I think we understand each other. don't we? I'll say now."

A few minutes later the two men separated and Ben returned to Woodroyd in a very thoughtful frame of mind. He realized that all his previous plans had been made useless; that a new factor had to be considered. For that matter, the events of the evening had upset all his previous calculations and a new danger had appeared on the horizon of his life.

He did not trouble much about Nancy's interview with his father; that had doubtless to do with some offer John Shawcross had made her. He knew Shawcross well; knew that he was a manufacturer of cretonnes, chintzes, and other linen goods in a small way. Probably he had been captivated by Nancy's designs and was disposed to utilize them; but as we have said, that did not trouble him. Knowing the manufacturing life of Yorkshire as he did, he was perfectly certain that there was no hope in that direction for Nancy to realize her dream. There was no designer in Leeds who made more than a few hundreds a year, and there was no danger of her making ten thousand pounds even if her fondest hopes should materialize.

But synthetic rubber was another matter. If Mary Judson, possessing her father's formula, had made it, then, as Langham had said, there might be millions in it.

He drove very slowly, and, as he went along the now nearly deserted streets, he considered the pros and cons again and again. Several facts stood out clearly in his mind, and each one of them disturbed him greatly. His one hope of winning Nancy lay in her non-success. If, as it appeared to him, she were able to get ten thousand pounds without him, he would, to put it in his own words, "cease to have any pull over her." On the other hand, if she failed, so great was her love for her old home, she would, he hoped, turn to him in order to realize her dreams.

All this hurt his vanity very much, for even yet he could not understand why Nancy had not yielded to his charms. Wasn't he Ben Briggs, the most sought after young man in Leeds? Wasn't he a partner in one of the

most prosperous concerns in the city? . . . Still, facts were facts, and he had to own to himself that up to now Nancy had yielded to none of his blandishments. Hence the danger in this new development. If Mary Judson had made this great discovery, or was on the brink of making it, Nancy would be utterly independent of him.

He called to mind what Sarah Ellen had told him. Mary Judson had promised Nancy that if she succeeded she would buy back her old home. Of course, this might mean nothing; nevertheless, it might mean danger. Mary Judson had all her father's papers; and if old Amos had been on the brink of discovery, might not his daughter altogether succeed?

He remembered something else. Evidently Mary had made a confidante of Nancy, she had admitted her into her laboratory and had spoken of her hopes and dreams; might she not therefore go further and take Nancy as her assistant? His sister Jessie had frequently spoken of Nancy's enthusiasm for chemistry, while Nancy's Cambridge professor had regarded her as his most promising pupil. Might not the two together discover the "one thing wanting" of which Langham had spoken?

By the time Ben reached Woodroyd he had become almost desperate. More enamoured of Nancy than ever, he determined that nothing should stand in the way of her becoming his wife, and he vowed that whatever or whoever his rival might be that rival should be destroyed. Ben found himself madly jealous, not of another man, for no man had appeared, but of synthetic rubber, for it was in that that the danger lay.

No, he would stop at nothing to get this thing out of the road; he would even go so far as to—

Almost unconsciously he drove the car into the garage and having switched off the ignition was preparing to enter the house when a new thought struck him.

Could it be possible, after all, that the girl was in love with some one else? Was that the reason she had refused him—him, Ben Briggs?

"By Gum, I'd murder him whoever he might be!" he muttered between his set teeth. "But nay, that cannot be; it would have leaked out before this."

He was sure there was no one in Cornwall; Jessie had set his mind at rest about that. She had spoken of Nancy as a girl without any love entanglements, as one who, prior to coming to Leeds, had never given a thought to young men. Was there anyone in Leeds who had caught her fancy? He had heard of more than one young man, who during the last few months had spoken in glowing terms of her beauty, her charm, her personality. He could think of half a dozen who would fall at her feet if she gave them the slightest encouragement. But who were they? No, there was no danger in that direction; he could think of no one who would compare with himself, no one who would be likely to succeed where he had failed. His rival was not a man, it was this legacy which her father had left her; it was here the danger lay.

He heard the Town Hall clock booming out the hour of midnight as he made his way towards the door by which he generally entered when he came home late, and noticed that the lights of the house were still burning.

"Evidently they haven't gone to bed yet," he reflected. "I wonder if she's gone?"

He had barely opened the door with his latch-key when he saw his father.

"Is that you, Ben? Have you come from the garage?"

"Yes, I've just left it."

"Is Dixon there?"

"Nay."

"Wherever can the man be?" said Elijah Briggs a little angrily. "I told him he was not to leave, and that he was to have the car ready at a quarter to twelve."

"Don't bother, Mr. Briggs." It was Nancy who spoke.

"I don't mind walking back a bit."

"Walk back at this time of the night! Not if I know it! Will you go out and see if Dixon is there, Ben?"

"I am sure he is not there," Ben replied, "and everything is in darkness."

"Ay, I'll sack that fellow; I will for sure," said Mr. Briggs angrily. "I promised Nancy he should take her home, and he's behaved like this."

"Is that all?" cried Ben almost joyfully. "I'll take Miss Trevanion to Laburnum Cottage with pleasure."

"Will you?" cried Nancy. "It would be awfully kind of you."

A few minutes later Ben got out his car again and with Nancy by his side was making his way into the road.

"I'll have another try," he determined, as he drove slowly towards the city.

CHAPTER XIV

BEN'S HOPES, AND NANCY'S

BY this time the fog had lifted, and although the night was still murky, driving was comparatively easy.

Ben drove very slowly. The distance between Woodroyd and Laburnum Cottage was not more than two miles, and he wanted to make the journey last as long as possible. He never remembered being so nervous before, and, try as he might, he could not think of words suitable to the occasion. When he had first made love to Nancy he found it comparatively easy. He spoke with freedom, and with a confidence which almost amounted to assurance. For that matter, the thought of her refusing him had never entered his calculations. Now, however, all was changed. Nancy's attitude towards him had made him realise that this almost penniless girl regarded him—Ben Briggs—lightly. And he felt he could not live without her; that all the world would be a blank unless she shared his life. He had been a long time in admitting it, but the fact remained. The events of that evening, moreover, had further weakened his confidence, and he knew that the utmost wisdom would have to be exercised if he wished to avoid failure.

"This is indeed kind of you," remarked Nancy presently. "I am afraid I was a little bit of a hypocrite when I told your father that I could easily walk home."

This gave Ben the opening he wanted, and he snatched at it eagerly.

"There is nothing kind about it," he said almost roughly; "I am only too glad of the chance. All the same, I don't like it."

"What? Not taking me home? Of course, it's awfully late," and there was a kind of challenge in the girl's voice.

"You know it isn't that," replied Ben. "What I don't like is that you should have to walk the streets of Leeds at all. I don't like the thought of your going around to factories and offices asking for orders as though you were a commercial traveller."

"I don't think I shall have to do that any more now," replied Nancy.

"Has anything happened?"

"Yes, a great deal has happened. I am accepting a post."

A silence of some seconds fell between them, while Ben carefully guided his car along the murky streets.

"I suppose I ought to congratulate you," he said presently; "but I don't."

"But surely——"

"I don't like you accepting any post, you know that."

"But this—in a way—is just what I wanted. I shall be, to an extent at all events, my own mistress, and make my own time. That means a lot, doesn't it?"

Ben did not reply to this, but kept gazing gloomily into the darkness of the night.

"Would it be presumption on my part to ask more about it?"

"Not at all," replied the girl, who felt in high good-humour at what Mr. Briggs had said concerning John Shawcross, "but I am afraid I cannot tell you anything yet. Things will be settled in a few days," she added complacently.

"Is it a post as designer?"

"Yes, I can say as much as that."

"Pardon me," said Ben, and he almost stopped the car as he spoke, "but I cannot help knowing what your hopes are. Do you expect to fulfil them by being a designer of tapestries and that sort of thing?"

Nancy did not reply.

"I know the business life of Leeds," went on Ben, "and while it may be well enough for men who have been brought up to it, it's a beastly life for women. Excuse me for saying so," he went on after another pause, "but you are not cut out for it. Oh, I know that you are clever, and all that sort of thing; but no woman should be troubled with the thought of making money, especially you. Besides, there is no need."

"But there is need," urged the girl; "it's imperative that I should."

"It isn't," replied Ben savagely. "Oh, I know what you are thinking about, I suppose I ought to know nothing about it, but I couldn't help learning. Look here," and Ben stopped the car altogether, "isn't there any chance for me? Wherever you go, you will never find anyone fonder of you than I am. I am just out of my mind about you, and there is nothing I wouldn't do for you, nothing. I know I have not an old name like you've got, but if you'll only tell me what you want I'll get it for you. As you know, you told father about the sale of your old home and the conditions you insisted on when it was sold. Well, I've thought a good deal about it, and I'll tell you this. On the day we are wed I'll give you the deeds of Trevanion Court as a wedding present. I will for sure. And if there is anything else you want you shall have it."

Ben's voice trembled as he spoke. He felt he was playing one of his best cards, and although it hurt him sorely to think that he—Ben Briggs—should have to offer a kind of bribe to make his proposal acceptable, he eagerly did it. He had stopped his car in an empty street close to an electric lamp in the light of which he could see Nancy's face plainly. Never surely had a man tried to win a fairer bride. There was not a girl in Leeds fit to be compared with her, and at that moment he felt he would give his immortal soul to possess her as his own. Almost ever since she had come north he had been planning to get her. And he would get her. It was for this purpose

he had gone to see Langham that very night ; to achieve this end he would gladly ruin all Miss Mary Judson's plans, and if needs be violate all honour. But he did not want to do this. He wanted to win Nancy fairly and by means that would not prick his conscience afterwards. Besides, Langham was a frail reed to rest upon, and nothing was certain in that direction. If, therefore, he could win her by this bribe, his purpose would be accomplished. Besides, it might not be a bad business proposition. Trevanion Court might be a sound investment. He had heard that Cornwall was rich in minerals, and if——

"I mean it," went on Ben earnestly. "If you promise to marry me I'll take steps at once, and in a month from now the deeds of the place shall be in my possession. Then, on the day we are wed I'll make you a present of it. What I would do for no one else in the world I'll do for you. Besides," he added as an afterthought ; "we could have it as a country house, and every now and then we could go there to live. I'm not trying to bribe you, don't think that ; but I do want you so badly ; I do really."

Nancy was in a susceptible mood that night. Her talk with Elijah Briggs had made her realize that while the post John Shawcross had offered her might prove a very good means of getting a living, it offered her no possible chance of fulfilling her dreams. And those dreams had become more and more dear to her as the months went by. Even as she sat by Ben's side and looked out on the dark, smoky street the picture of her old home came to her. She saw the old family house, the house which had been possessed by her people for many generations, standing out clear and fair against the sunny sky ; saw the old trees by which it was surrounded ; saw the great avenue which had been standing there for hundreds of years and which led up to the doorway. It all came to her like a flash of light. There was the coat of arms which had been cut in granite, and which, in spite of the centuries, stood out clear and bold. She saw the old mullioned windows, the many gables, the spacious court-yard.

The picture acted like a spell upon her and appealed to every instinct of her nature. It was the home of her people, the home made dear by the associations of centuries. She almost shuddered at the thought that it was in the possession of old Jack Beel, the one-time groom and stable-boy of her father.

No one knew how she had suffered on the day of the sale or how greedily she had insisted on the option on the day Jack Beel had bought it. The one bright light in her sky on the day she had left was the thought that in five years she might get it back.

And now that possibility might be a reality. All she had to do was to promise to become the wife of this man at her side and the old home would be hers again, hers for ever and always. If she married Ben Briggs, Trevanion Court could become again what it had been in the past. She saw the old building restored, and filled with beautiful things; saw it as it should be, the fitting home of one of the oldest families in the country.

But the price!

Yes. That must be borne in mind. She would have to marry Ben Briggs; it was the essential part of the bargain. For it *was* a bargain. She must give herself to this man in order to fulfil her promise to her dying father.

And she could see no other way of fulfilling it. It was true she had more than four years in which to get the money, but what prospects had she? To get ten thousand pounds by being a designer to John Shawcross was out of the question. As to what Mary Judson had said to her, it was as vague and unsubstantial as a cloud.

"You like me, don't you?" persisted Ben.

"Of course I like you," she replied almost unthinkingly.

"You are the brother of my greatest friend and you've been very kind to me."

"I don't mean in that way," Ben burst out almost angrily. "What I mean is—— You like me, don't you?"

Yes, she liked Ben well enough, and sometimes he proved an almost amusing companion. He had been well educated, dressed well, and held his head high in this metropolis of Yorkshire. She knew, too, that Ben was much thought of in Leeds, and that more than one wealthy girl would be willing to become his wife. Of course, he was nothing like the man of whom she had dreamt, but he was quite presentable, and there could be no doubt but that he was very fond of her. His very presence, the earnestness with which he spoke, assured her of that.

But to promise to be his wife !

That was the fact which rose up before her mind like a mountain ; to give herself to him, to be the property of this self-satisfied, commercial young man. Well, why not ? She, like other modern girls, had laughed at sentiment, and of being in love. And yet in her heart of hearts she had the feeling that marriage without love was a kind of sacrilege. And she fully meant to marry at some time, although the thought did not possess her mind strongly. Why not Ben Briggs as well as anyone else ?

" There is no one else, is there ? " asked Ben anxiously. " You are not in love with any other chap, are you ? "

" No." Almost before she was aware the word had passed her lips.

" Then let's settle it up," he cried eagerly. " You know how pleased my people will be, father thinks you are the finest girl in the world, so does mother. As for Jessie — But there, I needn't talk about that. Say yes, Nancy," and his voice became plaintive.

She was on the point of uttering the word he wanted to hear. It seemed to her the one way in which she could fulfil her promise to her dying father ; the one way by which the home of the Trevanions could remain the home of a Trevanion. But the word was not uttered ; even while it was formulating itself her father's presence became real to her. Would he have her do this ? Would he, loving the old place with all the fervour of his life, have her sell herself in order to possess it ?

"Of course I feel tremendously flattered, Mr. Ben," she said, "but I can't."

"You mean it?"

"I am afraid I do."

"But why?"

"Because, although I like you very much as a friend, I cannot think of you in that way."

Ben sat motionless in the car for some time without speaking; the blow she had given him was harder to bear than he imagined such a blow could be. Every fibre of his being seemed unstrung, every instinct of his nature was wounded.

Presently and almost mechanically he switched on the ignition, pressed the self-starter of his car, and then drove slowly toward Laburnum Cottage. During the remainder of the distance he sat with his eyes fixed on vacancy, his teeth set and his heart full of disappointment and rage. When at length he reached the gate of Laburnum Cottage he placed his left hand on Nancy's arm.

"Do you see any other way by which you can buy your old home?" he asked.

Nancy shook her head.

"Of course you don't; and you never will—*never*!" the words escaped him slowly. "Have you given up hope?" he continued.

"No," replied the girl.

"And you see no way of doing it?"

"No."

"Mind, I am not giving you up; I never give up, and the time will come when you are going to give me the answer I want."

Nancy did not speak, but her very silence seemed like a denial of his words.

"I am not given to threatening," went on Ben, "but you'll never do what's in your heart to do without me, *never*."

To Nancy the words seemed like a challenge.

"Yes, I will, Mr. Ben," she assured him as she stepped

out of the car. "Good night, and thank you very much for driving me home."

"You never will," he repeated, ignoring her adieu, "*never*," and then drove away.

Nancy stood on the doorstep for a few seconds before letting herself in. Even as it was when he had proposed to her the first time it was now. He had said then that she would one day give him a different answer, and his words had seemed like a kind of prophecy. They seemed that now and she felt like shuddering.

A minute later the feeling was dispelled. No sooner had she opened the door than she met Miss Mary Judson.

"Ay, Nancy lass," cried the woman excitedly, "I've done it!—done it this very night!"

"Done what?"

"Made rubber. It's the best I've ever done too. Coom and I'll show you."

CHAPTER XV

WAS IT SUCCESS ?

MARY JUDSON'S face was flushed with excitement while her eyes burnt like living coals.

"I've been at it all the time you've been away," she said hoarsely. "I saw Sarah Ellen abed and then I went at it."

"Tell me about it."

"Nay, you must coom and see for yourself. I've got it out in the laboratory and I did it all, every bit of it. I weighed the ingredients, and mixed them just as I've seen my father do many a time ; and this time I've got it !"

"But you got it before," said Nancy.

"Not like this, I've never made it like this since father died."

The woman's hands shook, her voice was trembling ; evidently she was on the verge of hysteria.

"Don't you think you'd better rest a little ?" asked the girl. "I can see you are worn out and I don't think it will be wise for us to go into the laboratory again."

"I tell you I cannot rest," replied Miss Judson. "As for going to bed—why, I couldn't lie still a minute. Come out into the laboratory at once ; I want to show you."

Seeing her excited condition Nancy thought it best to humour her, and she accompanied her through the back door into the yard. As soon as they had entered the laboratory Mary Judson became herself again ; the place seemed to act upon her like a charm, and instead of being almost hysterical she was the cool calculating scientist again.

"Seè," she said, turning to some brown stuff which lay on the table. "This is what I made to-night."

Nancy examined it critically. Yes, it had every appearance of rubber, and to the uninitiated it would surely pass as that. And yet the girl was not sure; doubts arose in her mind in spite of herself.

"You say this is as good as your father made?" she asked presently.

"Better."

"Mary," said Nancy, "you told me that from one of the batches your father produced motor tyres were made, and that they ran for some time in the streets of Leeds. Are you sure of that?"

"Do you doubt my word?" and there was anger in the woman's tones.

"Not for a moment," replied the girl. "You are no more capable of telling a lie than you are of flying to the moon, but even the best of us are mistaken. Are you certain that those motor tyres were manufactured of the rubber your father made?"

The woman looked on the floor and for a little time was silent.

"Ay, I've often thought of that," she said like one speaking to herself. "I've wondered if Jim Fletcher, in his anxiety to please father, didn't substitute grown rubber. I've often thought I would ask Jim, but he's dead now. He died more than a year ago. However, I made *that*," and she pointed to the heap on the table; "I made it this very night. I'm going to have it tested too."

"Have you any grown rubber in the place—sheeted, I mean?"

"Ay, here's some."

Nancy compared the two, compared them carefully.

"You can hardly tell one from the other, can you?" and the woman laughed with pride.

"They are very much alike," said Nancy slowly, "and yet, there seems to be a difference."

"What difference?"

"I don't know. Only this," and she pointed to the grown Para rubber, "seems alive, while yours looks dead."

"Nay, there is no difference between them."

"Can you make it again?" asked Nancy after another long silence.

"I'll make it before your very eyes; I'll make it now."

"But you're too tired."

"Tired! I feel as though I shall never be tired again. Coom, watch me."

A few minutes later Nancy had forgotten her interview with Elijah Briggs, forgotten even Ben's proposal of marriage; all her old love for chemical experiments had come back to her, and she had become a scientific enthusiast. But more than that, if Mary Judson was right she could defy Ben Briggs's prophecy, she could . . . The prospects were great.

Eagerly she watched while Mary Judson weighed out the various ingredients. Common things some of them were, such as glucose, treacle, and other things of an ordinary nature. Presently a large iron pan was filled, and then the two together lifted it on to a receptacle under which electric wires ran.

"Now see," whispered Miss Judson. "I'll switch on the current and in eighteen minutes it'll be at the proper heat. We'll keep it there for two hours, and then——" The woman's voice died away in silence, she might have been afraid to conclude the sentence.

"Is that all?" asked Nancy.

"I'll just screw down the cover a bit tighter," replied Miss Judson, "and then there'll be nothing to do but wait."

Perhaps the hardest thing in the world to do is to wait, to wait quietly, to wait patiently, and it is only those who are strong and confident who can do it. Action is not the greatest revelation of character. Waiting in silence and fortitude is far greater. Many can face great difficulties if they can be up and doing something. It is only the strong who, having done all that is possible, can sit down and quietly and calmly wait events.

During the preparation for this further test of Mary Judson's power to make rubber, it had come to Nancy that during the next few hours her future would be decided. Why it was she did not know, but she believed that upon the outcome of Mary's venture her own destiny would be shaped. During the preparation of the ingredients and placing them in the iron receptacle before her, Nancy had been calmly keen and watchful. Her whole mind and memory had been concentrated upon Mary Judson's actions, and at the end she could have recited correctly everything the woman had done.

Her work had been completed at length, at least Nancy thought so. The last ingredient she thought had been placed in the pan, but before screwing it down Mary had taken a packet of brown-looking powder and scattered it over the rest.

"What is that?" asked Nancy.

Mary Judson was silent.

"What is that?" repeated the girl.

"I daren't tell you, Nancy, I daren't for sure."

• "Is it important?"

"Ay, it's important, at least I think it is."

"Why should it be important? Tell me what it is."

Nancy's interest had become almost feverish by this time, and she was unable to control her words. But Mary Judson did not speak; even although she had allowed her to see her while the precious stuff was being made, she could not fully trust her. Why, she could not have told.

Taking a spanner Miss Judson gave the extra turn to the screws which fastened the covers of the pan and then she switched on the electric current which was placed at the base of the pan.

"Two hours and thirty-two minutes," muttered the woman, looking at her watch. "That's the time."

"What's the electric current for?" asked Nancy.

"What is it for? Why, to heat the mixture."

"What voltage is there?"

"Two hundred and fifty. Now then, don't talk any more ; we must wait."

It was during the next two hours and a half that Nancy realized how hard waiting was. The first half-hour passed by moderately quickly, but after that every second seemed to pass on leaden feet. She tried to read, but could not. Even when the words before her were not a blur, her mind refused to fasten on their meaning ; everything was chaos.

What if the venture should prove a success ? What if it should not prove a success ? Why should that sticky mess which had been placed in the pan turn out rubber ? What action was going on inside the pan which Mary Judson said would change the ingredients, and unite and coalesce them into a complete whole ?

The thing was impossible. It had no more value than the hocus-pocus of a cheap-jack chemist at a country fair. And yet why not ? She had Mary Judson's own word that the piece of rubber which lay on the table by her side, was a few hours before identical with the stuff which had been placed in the pan.

Her every nerve was in tension, her head throbbed violently, while the minutes crept slowly on, and while the steady glow of electricity beneath the pan helped to brighten up the room.

"Doesn't the current seem to be weakening ? I am sure the force is not so much as it was half an hour ago."

"The current doesn't change ; it's the same from hour to hour, all through the day, and all the night," replied Mary Judson impatiently.

The first hour passed.

"I'll go into the house and sit by the fire," said Nancy to herself. "I'm shivering with the cold here."

But she did not move ; something seemed to chain her to the laboratory which Amos Judson had built years before and in which he had spent so much of his life. She was afraid lest something should happen while she was away ; something which would nullify what had been done. Oh, if she could only do something !

But there was nothing to do. All that could be done had been done, and all that remained was to wait.

She tried to occupy her mind by thinking of her girlhood; of the time she had passed at a preparatory school; of her first term at St. Andrew's and of her early experiences at a great public school; but nothing had any attraction for her. Even the days following her father's death when Trevanion Court was sold ceased to interest her except for her passion to buy it back again.

And that depended upon the chemical action which was going on within that iron pan before her.

She looked at her watch. It had ceased ticking. She had forgotten to wind it up.

"What's the time?"

"A quarter to three."

"Did you wind up your watch?"

"Of course I did."

Mary Judson spoke to her just as an automaton might speak; her mind was far away. She kept looking at the pan with a steady stony gaze.

After what seemed an interminable silence Mary Judson spoke again.

"Another hour," she said.

To Nancy another hour seemed like an eternity; she felt as though she could not wait any longer. A thousand mad thoughts chased through her brain. Surely there were evil influences about; spirits of the dead seemed to fill the room forbidding them to proceed with their unholy experiments. She heard far-away voices, voices that were strange and discordant.

"What's that?"

"What's what?"

"I am sure I heard footsteps. People are watching us."

"Nonsense. Everybody in Leeds is abed long sin'." Mary Judson lapsed into the vernacular of her people. . . .

"Two minutes more."

Thank Heaven the time was nearly up at last! The

weary waiting was almost over, and even although everything proved a fiasco it would be better than continued waiting. That two hours and a half would remain in Nancy's mind and memory as a kind of nightmare.

"There, I'll turn off the current," and suiting the action to the words the woman placed her finger on the electric switch.

A few minutes later she was unscrewing the bolts, and then together they lifted the heavy cover on to the floor.

Nancy could see nothing. A great volume of steam was emitted from the pan, and she heard the sound of bubbling. A minute later the steam passed away and before them lay a mass of dark sticky-looking substance.

"Is it any good?" asked Nancy feverishly.

"I'll tell you in a minute," and Mary Judson spoke very quietly.

But Nancy could not wait for her friend. Seizing the stick with which, nearly two hours before, Mary had stirred the ingredients which was then a thick fluid, she placed it in the pan.

It was no longer a fluid! Of that she was sure. Something more resistive; something harder had taken its place. Mary Judson caught the stick from Nancy's hand and prodded the stuff in the pan.

"It's rubber!" she cried excitedly, "it's rubber!"

So great was Nancy's excitement that she would have taken the stuff in her bare hand, but Mary Judson held her back.

"Doan't be a fool," she cried, again lapsing into the Yorkshire vernacular, "thou'lt scald thesen. We'll wait till it's cooled down a bit.

This seemed possible now; there was something tangible, something real to wait for. The stuff in the pan had undergone a change; it was no longer the fluid sticky mess which the woman had stirred hours before. What it was she could not tell, but at any rate that was evident.

"I am going into the house to get a cup of tea for us both," Nancy cried.

" All right. I expect the fire'll be out, but you can use the gas stove." Mary Judson was looking intently at the contents of the pan.

Nancy unlocked the door and peered into the night. It was as dark as pitch, and a heavy fog again brooded over the city. But she was sure she heard something ; something like the rustle of garments, the sound of hasty footsteps. Surely it must be the fancy of her excited imagination. As Mary Judson said, the city was asleep, and yet the sound of footsteps was real. When she entered the house all was as silent as death, not a sound of any sort was to be heard.

Of course she had been mistaken. In her excitement her imagination had conjured up things which did not exist.

A few minutes later the kettle was boiling and she had prepared tea for herself and her friend. Nancy felt like singing. Her heart was strangely light, and hope rose triumphant. She felt sure that the night had been a success, that what she had longed for would come to pass. Hastily putting edibles and plates on a tray beside the teapot she made her way into the yard again, and Mary Judson hearing her opened the door.

" Ay, lass," cried the woman, " I'm glad you thought of this."

" Is it cool yet ? "

" It will be in another hour."

" Is it rubber ? "

" I think so, but I don't know yet. I daren't handle it till it's cooler. But this tea is good."

Evidently she had felt as keenly anxious as Nancy during the time of their waiting, but now that the suspense was over she was a changed woman.

An hour later the two women had lifted the contents of the pan on to a table they had placed near them, and Mary Judson was eagerly examining what lay before her.

" I am afraid it's a failure," she said at length.

" A failure ! It can't be ; it's rubber."

" Ay, it's rubber right enough, but it's not as good as my

last lot ; it hasn't the same substance ; the same body, the same quality. I thought I'd perfected it, but I haven't. Ay, I feel just like giving up."

"But how can you say that ? I'm sure it's rubber, and I'm sure it will vulcanize."

The woman did not reply for a few seconds, she was looking with unseeing eyes into vacancy.

"I'm tired ; I'm worn out ; I can't think," she said slowly. "You may be right, you may be wrong ; but whatever it is is here ; so we'll lock the door and go to bed."

It was nearly midday when Nancy awoke, and even when consciousness came to her she did not realize where she was. The room was almost as dark as when she went to bed, for the fog of the previous day had become heavier and thicker.

Little by little, however, facts became plain. She remembered her visit to Elijah Briggs, followed by her midnight ride through Leeds with Ben. After that came her experiences in the laboratory.

"Where was Mary Judson," she wondered, "and had she suffered any effects from her experiences of the previous night ? "

Hastily dressing she made her way downstairs, where she met Sarah Ellen.

"I 'eerd yo' moving about," Sarah Ellen greeted her, "so I've got your breakfast ready. I'll bring it in in a minute. There's a good fire i' t' room. Ay, it's an awful fog outside, isn't it ? "

This was a long speech for Sarah Ellen and Nancy noted her garrulousness. Usually she was very taciturn, volunteering no remark, and answering only in monosyllables. Nancy concluded that Sarah Ellen had heard pleasant news.

"Is Miss Judson down yet ? " she asked.

"Ay, she's been down more now an hour. It wur only a little after ten when she got up, and she went straight into t' laboratory. She's a rare 'un for science is Miss Mary. I never seed owt like it."

"Has she had breakfast?"

"Nay. She said she'd wait for you. Did you sleep well, miss?"

"Yes, very well. Did you?"

"Ay, I did an' all. It wur only a bit after ten when I went to bed and I slept till eight o'clock. It wur that dark, wurn't it? Ay, but I do enjoy my bed. Shall I do a bit of toast for you, miss?"

"Sarah Ellen is in a good temper this morning," reflected Nancy as she found her way into the sitting-room. "I never knew her so conversational before. The idea of her offering to make toast."

Just then Mary Judson came into the room and it was plainly to be seen that although Sarah Ellen was in a great good-humour, Miss Judson looked depressed and disappointed.

"It's no good," she asserted.

"Do you mean to say that we didn't make rubber?" asked Nancy in a whisper.

"Ay, we made it, but the quality is poor."

"That's all right."

"But it's not all right," replied the woman. "If we can't make it of a uniform quality it's no good as a commercial proposition. I did think I had it right too. But it's the same old thing over again; it was just that in father's days. More than once he said to me, 'Mary lass, we've got it, we're as safe as Gibraltar,' and then when he tried again it was just like this."

"I'll go out and have a look," cried Nancy.

"No, you mustn't; Sarah Ellen might have some suspicions of what we are after if you did, and I don't want anyone to know."

"You are not going to give up, then?"

"Give up? Never. Why, the first batch I made was right good and I felt sure we'd got it. It's only some little thing wrong, just a *little thing*."

"I feel certain about it now," cried Nancy, who was not in the least affected by Miss Judson's evident dis-

appointment. Now that she had seen rubber made and was certain that the invention did not exist merely in Miss Judson's imagination, she felt confident. Once admit the fact, and perfecting it was only a matter of time.

"We'll have another try after breakfast," Nancy asserted, "and perhaps we may be able to discover wherein our failure lies."

Sarah Ellen entered at that moment with breakfast.

"I hope I've cooked it right," she volunteered. "I know you like your bacon hot and I've only this moment taken it out of the frying-pan."

She gave a quick searching glance at the woman as she spoke and then made her way into the kitchen again.

"Sarah Ellen seems in a good temper this morning," said Nancy. "I've never known her so bright since I came."

But Miss Judson took no notice; she was evidently deep in thought about the great dream of her life.

Immediately after breakfast they went to the laboratory again.

Four hours later when the two women returned to the house together, Miss Judson burst into tears.

"Ay, Nancy lass," she cried, "and all this for nothing."

"It's not for nothing!" cried Nancy. "In a month from now we'll have found out the secret. It's true that the last experiment, like the other, has not been a complete success, but we are so near to it that I am certain of the future. It only wants time and patience. Why, even now you are further on than your father was."

"Am I? I wish I was sure. Oh, if only father were alive! He'd put his finger on the spot right away. It's terrible to feel so helpless and so lonely; but I'm glad I've got you."

"You'll do it," Nancy assured her; "it may take you years, but you'll do it."

"Years!" cried the woman. "Why, I may not live years. I am not strong, Nancy, and I think sometimes that my anxiety to be successful in this thing has under-

mined my strength. Besides, I did want to make enough money to buy back your old home for you. I believe I am as interested in that as you are. How long did you say the option was?"

"We've heaps of time, heaps. Why, we've more than four years yet."

"Four years," repeated the woman slowly. "I wonder now—I wonder——"

"That reminds me," said Nancy, "that I must go to see John Shawcross at once."

"You are going to accept his offer, of course," assented Miss Judson.

"I must," replied the girl. "The little money I had has dwindled every week, and although the salary he offers is small it will be better than nothing."

"Ay," replied Miss Judson, "but I did hope—I did hope—— But you are right, lass; never give up a certainty for an uncertainty, however brilliant the uncertainty seems to be."

That same evening Nancy signed the document which John Shawcross had prepared, and promised to give him her exclusive services for the next two years.

CHAPTER XVI

NANCY BECOMES SUSPICIOUS

FOUR days later, when Nancy returned from John Shawcross's Mill, she found Miss Judson apparently anxious and perturbed. Still, the woman greeted her kindly and asked her how she was liking her work.

"I am liking it splendidly."

"And do you think you will find those men easy to work with?"

"I am sure I shall; both of them seem anxious to make things pleasant for me. They've prepared a room for me in the mill and have fitted it with every convenience. If I am unsuccessful, it will not be their fault. Oh, I do hope they will succeed. Both of them are terribly anxious. From what they tell me they are investing practically the whole of their capital in new machinery in order to produce my designs, so that if they don't succeed I shall feel that I am responsible."

Mary Judson did not reply; she was looking into vacancy and her thoughts seemed far away.

"Is anything the matter with you?"

"I am a bit bothered."

"Has anything happened?"

"Nay, not as you may say happened."

"What is it, then?"

"I don't know what to do," replied the woman slowly.

"I can't make up my mind."

"What about?"

"Oh, I don't want to bother you; you've got enough to think about."

"But you won't bother me, whatever it is. Tell me, there's a dear."

But Mary Judson did not speak. She was silent for more than a minute, then she burst out suddenly:

"Ay, I've tried again, Nancy, tried three times since—since—you know."

"And after promising me that you'd give your mind a rest for a week."

"I couldn't help it, my dear, I simply couldn't. But it's come to nothing. I am just where I was. As we said, it's only a little thing that's wanting; oh, if I could only find out what it is!"

"If you could only trust me with that formula I should be in a better position to help you," was Nancy's reply. "You know I would not divulge your secret, Mary."

"I know you wouldn't. I would trust you with everything I have and am; but I promised father before he died that I'd never let anyone see it before I made a success of it. That's the real truth of the matter. *I want to let you see it!* I want us to go over it point by point together and find out the thing that's missing; but I daren't. I never disobeyed my father during his life, and I don't want to disobey him now he's dead. That's why——"

"Yes, what is it?" asked Nancy as the woman lapsed into silence.

"I've had a visitor to-day," said Mary Judson, "and it's bothering me. I don't know what answer to give him."

"A visitor? Do I know him?"

The woman shook her head.

"No, he's never been here since your time. He's called Langham, and my father used to say he was a genius. He used to work here. Father kept him as a kind of handy lad; then, not long before he died, he got rid of him. Anyhow, he went away. I don't know any reason."

"But why should his visit bother you?"

"He wants the use of the laboratory and I've been wondering if it wouldn't be wise for me to let him. You

see, Nancy, I have a feeling that I can't go any further by myself, and it might be—— I've a good mind to let him come," she added suddenly. "Father used to talk with him by the hour, and although he didn't tell him anything, he said his conversation was a kind of mental stimulus; that he could always think better after he'd been talking with Langham. I wonder if it would have the same effect upon me?"

"I shouldn't bother if I were you," was Nancy's reply.

"But I must," and excitement shone from the woman's eyes. "I mayn't live long, and I want to succeed before I die. I promised father I would, and I wouldn't break my word for anything. Besides, I've promised you too."

"Don't talk about dying. You'll live to a ripe old age. In any case don't trouble about me."

"Ay, but I must. I promised myself the very moment I knew what was in your heart that I'd buy back your old home, and give it you; but I can't do it by myself, and—and he might help me." He's coming again to-night," she added.

"Coming again to-night?"

"Yes. I want you to see him; I want you to tell me what you would do."

Rapidly she told Nancy of Langham's former connection with her father and related something of his early history. Told of his thirst for knowledge, of his taking classes at the Yorkshire College; told of the professors' opinions concerning him, and the eagerness with which he absorbed information.

"What he wants," concluded Miss Judson, "is the use of my laboratory. He says he has some important experiments that he wants to make, and that no one in Leeds has such a complete laboratory as I have. In return for this he says he's willing to give me every help in his power in anything I am trying to do."

"Isn't it rather a strange proposal?"

"Perhaps it is, I don't know; but I remember what father used to say about him. He told me more than once

that if Langham had better opportunities he would go far as an experimental chemist. He said that in his way he was a genius, and that he learnt more from Langham than Langham had learnt from him."

"Has he any idea what you are trying to do?" asked Nancy.

"Not the slightest. I put several feelers to him about that, but I am sure he never dreams of where I am. It's only a straw, Nancy, but I'm wanting to catch at any straw. You see, unknown to himself, he may be able to help me. Besides, if I could put anything in his way I want to do it. I am sure father would like that."

That night, after the two women had finished their evening meal, Sarah Ellen announced their visitor. Evidently Langham had got himself up for the occasion. He wore a new ready-made suit, which did not fit him at all badly, and he had altogether a different appearance from what he had on the night of Ben Briggs's visit to him.

"This is my friend, Miss Trevanion," Miss Judson informed him when he had drawn up his chair before the fire.

Nancy looked at him steadily; noted his weak-looking chin, his undecided mouth, and his small shifty eyes. The man's face did not please her; he was not in the least reminiscent of the genius that Mary Judson had described. He looked more like a third-rate draper's assistant than a clever chemist. His physique impressed her unfavourably too; his sloping shoulders, his narrow chest, and his almost bandy legs made her think of him with something like contempt. A little later, however, her opinion was modified. His head was well shaped and his broad forehead betokened intellectuality of no common order. His eyes, too, impressed her; they might be small, and suggest a kind of cunning, but they spoke of something more than cunning. The man, whatever else he might be, was clever—perhaps more than clever.

"It's rare and kind of you to see me again, Miss Judson," he remarked as he took a cigar from the box she offered him; "I know I've no claim on you, but it's no use

pretending that I am not anxious for you to do what I asked you."

"You've married since you left my father, haven't you?"

"Ay, I've married and have got two bairns. I'm thinking about them and my wife more than I'm thinking about myself," he added. "I don't say I don't get good wages at the mill; I do; but I want to do something better for myself than being in a spinning mill, Miss Judson. I have the bairns to educate, and I can't educate them as I would like out of my wage. Of course, you know a good bit about me."

"I've heard my father speak about you a good deal."

"Ay, you will have. Your father did more for me than all the professors at the Yorkshire College. If I've said it once I've said it a hundred times that your father was the grandest man and the grandest chemist in Leeds, or in the country for that matter. Folks didn't understand him; they never do understand a man who is ahead of his times; all the same, he knew more about chemistry than all the professors in Yorkshire College rolled into one. If he'd lived he would have done great things."

He knew he was safe in saying these things; knew that if there was a vulnerable spot in Miss Judson's hard nature it was this. She worshipped the memory of her father, and loved to hear him spoken about.

"I've always said, too, that there is no laboratory in connection with the whole of the Victoria University that's equal to your father's; no chemical apparatus anywhere like his. It would be a godsend to me if I could use it sometimes. I know I can't pay you for it in money, Miss Judson, but I know you are as keen on chemistry as your father was, and if I can help you in any way, I'd work for you night and day; I would for sure. You see, my whole future seems at stake just now."

"In what way?" asked Nancy.

"In this way, Miss Trevanion. I've got an invention of my own that I want to perfect—no, that's the wrong word; it's not an invention, it's a discovery."

"A discovery of what?"

"It's a new dye I have in my mind; a dye that will revolutionize the whole of the woollen trade. Yes, I'll be perfectly frank about it, for I'm sure you wouldn't betray me. England lost aniline dyes through the pigheadedness of the so-called scientific men, and the Germans gained by our loss. English people refused to take up aniline dyes, while the Germans had brains enough to have them. That's why they are miles ahead of us in that direction. Well, my discovery will knock spots off aniline dyes."

"You mean that it's a development of the same idea?" asked Nancy.

"It's more than that, miss; it opens up a new world. It touches new possibilities, and when it's perfected we shall be able to be as far ahead of the Germans as they are ahead of us. It's the greatest thing in the world," he added enthusiastically. "It will make all the old scientific fossils rub their eyes in wonder. I've got it all here," and he tapped his forehead significantly.

"Then you haven't perfected it yet?"

"I'm handicapped, miss. I approached the authorities of the Yorkshire College and asked them to allow me to use their laboratory, but they refused. And theirs is the only laboratory except yours that's of any use to me. I know what I want, and what you've got will suit me down to the ground. Mind you, I've got a bit of a place of my own, and I've spent every spare penny I could scrape together in fitting it up. It's served me well too, and although I say it as shouldn't, I've done wonders in it. If you'll come up," he added with a burst of confidence, "I'll show it to you. But the place will not take me far enough; there are lots of things which I can't afford to get, and which I haven't got room for. That's why I've asked Miss Judson to help me. I thought for the sake of the interest her father had in me she might do it, and in return I'd do everything in my power to help her."

"And you feel sure that if you had the use of Miss Jud-

son's laboratory you could perfect your discovery?" asked the girl.

"I am certain I could, as certain as that I sit here and am smoking this Corona cigar."

"How long would you want the laboratory?" asked Miss Judson.

"Say a month. I am sure I could do it in a month."

He went on to explain in technical terms how far he'd got, while the two women listened eagerly. It was easy to see that Miss Judson sympathized with him; doubtless her own experiences accentuated this sympathy. And yet there might be doubt at the back of her mind and she eagerly looked towards Nancy as if for advice and guidance.

"How long have you been giving attention to this?" asked Nancy presently.

"All my life as you may say," replied the man. "This is my subject, the subject to which I have given all my brains ever since I first took an interest in chemistry. Ask the professors at the Yorkshire College, they'll let you know."

"Is it the *only* subject you are interested in?" asked Nancy suddenly.

"Practically the only subject."

"You are sure? Mind what you are saying; *sure*?"

The man started as if some one had stung him, and Nancy saw that his eyes narrowed, that the cunning look which had struck her at first became emphasized.

"What do you mean by that?" he asked.

Why it was the girl could not have told, but almost in spite of herself she found herself saying what she had never intended to say.

"There are other subjects you are more interested in than dyes," she said; "one in particular."

After Langham left an hour later the two women sat silent; each seemed to be thinking deeply of what had passed.

"What made you take Langham up so short?" asked Mary Judson at length.

"I don't trust him," replied Nancy.

"What do you mean by that?"

"I hardly know what I mean. I don't like his chin, I don't like his mouth, and I like his eyes still less."

"Isn't that silly?"

"I dare say it is; but it's true."

"Would you do what he asks?"

"No, I wouldn't."

"What are your reasons for saying so?"

"I have no reasons—at least, none worth giving. Apparently the fellow seemed absolutely frank and truthful; he answered every question plainly and seemed very earnest about his work; but if I were you I wouldn't let him come near the laboratory."

"But what harm can he do? The only fear I feel from anyone is that he should steal my secret, and that's impossible. I have the formula locked up in my safe, and I destroy every copy of it as soon as I have made it. As for anything else, he's welcome to learn it."

"All the same, I wouldn't let him come in the place—Oh, I know I seem unreasonable; but you asked me a question, and I can't help replying to it."

"It would seem so unkind," said Mary Judson slowly. "The poor fellow is depending upon me for help, and it seems such a little thing to do. Supposing you or I were in his place, wouldn't we think it hard to be refused?"

"I dare say we should, and I've no reasons except a woman's reasons. I don't like him, and I felt all the time he was here that he had reasons for coming other than those he stated. Did you notice his eyes contract when I told him that there were other subjects he was interested in besides dyes?"

"Nay, I didn't notice."

"I did. Of course, I don't know what's in his mind; but I am sure that if you do what he asks you, you will repent of it."

"Maybe you are right," said Mary after another long silence; "but I feel so helpless, Nancy. I have been

trying for years to perfect what my father began, and I seem to be getting no nearer."

Two days later Ben Briggs received the following letter :

"DEAR SIR,—

"According to your instructions I visited Miss Mary Judson and asked for the use of her laboratory. I told her I was anxious to perfect a discovery I had made in dyes and that my own chemical apparatus was utterly insufficient for that purpose. When I saw her first she seemed to be disposed to grant my request, but after a second visit, she told me that she could not do what I asked.

"I have come to the conclusion that I should have got what I wanted but for the young woman who lives with her. Miss Trevanion, she says she's called, a proud sort of lass who took the high hand with me. She asked me a lot of questions, but she got nothing out of me. Anyhow, I believe it was she who kept Miss Judson from consenting. You will see, therefore, that our guns are spiked for this time. I will have another shot in the matter, however, and I believe I shall get what I want.

"Forgive me for mentioning it, but could you let me have ten pounds? My missis has been very poorly and doctors' bills are heavy.

"I am, Dear Sir,

"Your obedient servant,

"WILFRED LANGHAM."

Ben read this letter more than once, and after each perusal he seemed increasingly thoughtful.

That same night Ben paid another visit to Langham's cottage.

CHAPTER XVII

LEEDS VERSUS TREVANION

MARY JUDSON sat in the sitting-room which usually went by the name of "The Room" at Laburnum Cottage, looking pale and wan. Dark rings were around her eyes, her face looked bloodless, while her figure had become more and more emaciated.

More than a year had passed since the night when Langham had paid his visit to her house. It was February then, and a cold foggy night. It was now May of the following year, although there were few signs of summer in Rhododendron Street. As she looked out of her house not a flower was to be seen, not even a blade of grass broke the grim, grey monotony of the long line of houses. Still, the air though smoke laden was warm, and suggested the coming of summer.

"I am feeling an old woman before my time," reflected Miss Judson. "I have no heart for anything. It's been disappointment after disappointment. I am sure I'm near complete success and yet I don't seem to be any further on than when Nancy first came."

She looked at her thin, almost transparent hands and sighed deeply.

"I seem as though I've only two things to live for," she went on thinking; "one is to do what father told me, the other is to fulfil Nancy's dream, and they both amount to the same thing. Oh, if I could only make it, and make it *properly*, I am sure I should get well and strong again; but I can't. I make it, and yet I *don't* make it. Sometimes it seems right good, and then again—— Ay, I'm ready

to give up all hope. But there, it's time for Nancy to come and I mustn't let her see me like this."

She heard a quick footstep on the asphalt outside, and turning saw Nancy coming towards the gate.

"She looks pale too," reflected Miss Judson. "She's not the same lass as when she came here nearly two years ago. Then her face was like peach-blossom, while now——"

"How are you, Mary?" Nancy greeted her cheerfully as she entered the room.

"I am all right," replied Miss Judson with a wan smile.

"No, you are not. What have you been doing all day? Working in the laboratory again?"

"No," replied the other, "I didn't feel up to it. I lay in bed until late, and since then I've been sitting here."

Nancy looked at her friend closely, noted the thin bloodless cheeks, saw how ill she was looking.

"You've been moping?" cried Nancy.

"Nay I've not, only——"

"Only what?"

"Oh, I don't know; never mind about me. How are you getting on?"

"What you want is a holiday," cried Nancy. "You want to go away from this awful Rhododendron Street—where there are no rhododendrons—you want to breathe the sea air, not this fetid smoky stuff, but real pure air. How long is it since you have had a holiday?"

"How long since *you've* had a holiday?" retorted Miss Judson.

"I don't want any, I am well and strong. Besides——" the girl stopped suddenly.

"Ay, lass," and the tears welled up in Miss Judson's eyes as she spoke; "it's been the same for you as it has been for me; neither of us have had a holiday because we couldn't afford one. Ay, if only I could make that stuff!"

"Look here," cried Nancy, "I've got good news for you."

"Good news? There is only one kind of news I want to hear, and that doesn't seem like coming."

"Oh yes, there is," and Nancy laughed as she spoke. "You and I are going away for a holiday. We are going to get out of smoky Leeds, and we are going down to Cornwall."

"Don't be silly," replied Miss Judson, and there was asperity in her voice. "Going to Cornwall costs money, and as you know I've got none. Neither have you."

"Yes, I have," cried Nancy. "Listen and I'll tell you all about it. You know my agreement with John Shawcross? I was to have a hundred a year as a kind of retaining salary, and if their business proved successful I should have my share in their success."

"Well, it hasn't been successful. You told me less than a month ago that the firm barely paid its way for the last twelve months."

"I was mistaken," cried Nancy. "Things did look rather badly at that time, but they've improved. John Shawcross came into my designing room this afternoon and told me so. He said that while my work had hung fire for a long time, it was at last being taken up, and he has got several orders from big firms in London. Just think of it, my dear!"

"Ay, lass, I'm right glad," cried Miss Judson, and a tinge of colour came into her pale cheeks.

"There is something better than that," cried the girl. "Look at that," and she took a cheque from her pocket and showed it to the other.

"A hundred pounds!" the woman almost gasped. "A hundred pounds!"

"Yes, and it's an *extra*! It has nothing to do with my salary. He gave it to me less than an hour ago, so you see I am as rich as a Jew. Now I tell you what we are going to do. We are going to lock up this house, give Sarah Ellen a holiday, and we are going down to my old home for a month."

"A month!"

"A month," repeated Nancy. "It will be beautiful down in Cornwall now: the sun will be shining, the birds

"Picture houses!" was the laughing reply. "Why, you'll not see a picture house while you are away. There is not a picture house within five miles of Trevanion Court. No, no, I am going to show you Cornwall, the real Cornwall; not fashionable watering-places, but great rocky cliffs, and a glorious sea. I am going to take you into the cottages of the people and we are going to have long walks over rocky hills."

"Ay, it'll be grand," exclaimed Miss Judson.

Indeed, when she bade Nancy good night at the door of her bedroom she looked ten years younger.

Half an hour later, however, her feelings had evidently undergone a change, for as Nancy lay in bed she heard Mary outside the door speaking in woebegone tones.

"I can't go after all," she wailed.

"Why can't you go?"

"Ay, it came to me when I was saying my prayers, and I can't go. What about that formula, Nancy?" she went on in a hoarse whisper. "I daren't leave it behind me, and as you know I can't take it with me."

"That'll be all right," was Nancy's laughing reply. "First thing to-morrow morning we'll go to that new Safe Deposit; we'll leave it there and you will have a stamped receipt for it."

"Nay," cried Miss Judson, "I daren't leave it in any Safe Deposit."

"Why, they are as safe as the Bank of England."

"I don't care, I should never be happy. I can't leave it there."

"Then leave it at your Bank. You can trust your Bank, can't you?"

"Ay, I suppose I could," admitted the woman in a changed tone. "The deeds of this house are there, and I could have the formula locked up in the same box."

"Of course you could," replied the girl. "Now go to bed and sleep soundly."

Three days later Nancy and Mary Judson were on their way to Cornwall. Starting early from Leeds and taking

advantage of a new service of trains that ran direct to the West without touching London they reached Plymouth while the sun was still high in the heavens.

Nancy had her fears that Mary would be overcome by the journey, but to her delight she did not even show signs of fatigue.

"I seem like one who has had a new lease of life, Nancy lass," she said more than once. "Ay, this is grand; it's just like going into a new world. Why, you don't seem as excited as I do."

But Nancy was excited. It was now two years since she had left Cornwall, and the thought of going back to her old home was joy untold. She said but little, however; her thoughts were too deep for words. Her joy was tinged with sadness, too. Although she was going back to her old home she was going as a stranger might go. It was no longer hers, and if she paid a visit to Trevanion Court she would have to pay it as one on sufferance. Of course she knew that young Jack Beel would welcome her with open arms, that everything there would be hers for the asking, but she knew she could ask for nothing. In one way it gave her almost as much pain as pleasure as the train swept Westward. How could it be otherwise when she was no nearer her heart's desire?

She had rarely heard from Cornwall since leaving it. Young Jack had written her three times, ostensibly on business, but really to tell her that his affections for her were unchanged. These letters she had answered in a friendly way; nevertheless, every line had proclaimed the fact that Jack's hopes were as far removed as ever. John Trefry had also written, but John's letters were like his speech, halting and somewhat reserved. Beyond this she had scarcely heard from the old county. She was not anxious to keep up friendships with the girls she had known there in former years, and as a consequence old acquaintances had wellnigh ceased. All this tinged her heart with sadness, and made her feel that the old days of happiness were gone for ever. The thought of seeing Trevanion

Court, not only in possession of a stranger, but of one who had no real right there, and no real love for its beauty or its old associations, gave her pain beyond words.

All the same, she was excited, joyfully excited. Leeds with its roaring machinery, its crowds, and its smoke-begrimed atmosphere, was behind her, and she was going to what seemed to her the land of beauty, and sunshine, and romance.

"Are we in Cornwall yet?" asked Miss Judson at length when the train left North Road, Plymouth.

"Not yet," replied the girl. "We've to get over Saltash Bridge first."

They stopped at Devonport station, and then having passed through two wayside halts the train found its way over Saltash Bridge towards the quaint little town on the other side.

"That's Cornwall," shouted Nancy, pointing out of the carriage window.

"Ay, it's rare and pretty," was Miss Judson's reply.

"Pretty!" cried the girl. "It's home! There, we are in Cornwall now. I feel I can breathe again."

"Ay, it's very nice," assented Miss Judson, "and it's different from Yorkshire; but I prefer Leeds. How green everything is!" she added.

"Listen!" cried Nancy as the train stopped at Saltash. "Isn't it glorious?"

"What's glorious?"

"Don't you hear the porters? Can't you catch the soft, caressing tones of their voices?"

The woman shook her head, not able to understand what the girl meant.

"Oh, I feel I could hug that porter," Nancy laughed.

"Hug the porter? Whatever for?"

"Can't you hear? Why, it's the Cornish dialect again. There, don't you hear it?"

"What's he saying?" asked Miss Judson.

Nancy laughed with joy.

"You stay there where you be to," she heard a man

say to an old woman. "Doan't you bother 'bout your bag, Mawther; I'll bring that to 'ee."

"It's just lovely," cried the girl. "And see how leisurely every one is! No hurry, no bustle; every one has plenty of time, and every one seems in a good temper."

The train crawled out of the station and swept through some of the most beautiful scenery in England. Looking out of the window they could see innumerable little creeks which glistened in the sunshine. The tide being high everything was at its loveliest, while the spring foliage covered hill and dale in their mantles of living green.

"Compare that with Yorkshire," cried the girl. "See all those men-of-war lying in the harbour there! See the woods sloping down to the shore. Oh, it's lovely! lovely!"

"Ay, it's all right in its way," assented Miss Judson, "but there are no coal-mines, no factories. How can people make brass here?"

"Brass," cried the girl. "Who cares about money when they can get this?"

The train swept on. St. Germans, Menheniot, Liskeard, Doublebois.

"Isn't it grand? Isn't it glorious?" Nancy kept on repeating.

"Ay, I'm enjoying myself very much," Miss Judson replied, "and it's very nice as a holiday; but give me Leeds as a settled thing. It feels more homely there than it does here."

At length the train began to descend into Bodmin Valley, or what is more commonly known as the Lynn Valley. Nancy, who had come this route scores of times in days gone by and had taken little or no notice of it, now looked at everything with new eyes.

"Even you must see that it's lovely, Mary," cried the girl. "Why, there is not another valley in England like it! Oh, I suppose there are prettier places—but don't you see, my dear? it's home, home! I've been away from it for two years, and when I left it I thought I should never see it again, and now——!"

Tears trickled down the girl's face, and her lips quivered. She remembered that it was not home to her now; that she did not possess a foot of land in the whole county, and that the home she loved so dearly was the property of Jack Beel, who at one time was her father's groom. Never had her desire to get it back been so strong; never did she long so much for money to buy the old homestead.

"Ay, I understand," said Mary Judson at length. She had been watching her friend for some time, not daring to speak. "It's not home to me, but it's home to you. I dare say you think of Laburnum Cottage as a grey, shabby-looking house in a shabby street, in a smoky town; but to me it's home, and if I'd been away from it for two years and was just going back I should be as excited as you are."

"Ah, but wait till you see Trevanion Court!" cried the girl.

"I suppose it's a grand place," replied Miss Judson.

"It isn't that," replied the girl, "there are a hundred finer houses in Yorkshire, but there is not one like it. I love every door, every window, every chimney in it. It was built by my people hundreds upon hundreds of years ago, and no one but a Trevanion has ever lived there until now. I think it will kill me to see it again and yet I *must* see it. I must feed my eyes upon it—yes, and feed my soul."

"We are strange creatures," said the Yorkshire woman after a long silence. "Did I ever tell you about Ebenezer Fletcher?"

"No. Who's he?"

"He lives in Halifax. He was a rich manufacturer and made heaps of brass; in fact, he was so taken up with making money that he never had a holiday in his life. Then one day he determined he'd have a holiday; so he took his wife, Eliza Fletcher, for a long trip on the Continent. He went to Sweden, to Norway, to Spain, to the Austrian Tyrol, and to Switzerland; he said he'd made a good do of it. He was away three months and then he

came back to Halifax. Do you know the first thing he did after he arrived ? ”

“ No. What ? ”

“ He went to his mill chimney and kissed it. He said that among all the things he had ever seen while he was away he never saw anything as beautiful as that mill chimney.”

“ Yes, I understand,” replied Nancy, “ but even the mill chimney was not like Trevanion Court is to me.”

At length the train arrived at the little station four miles away from the village where Nancy had arranged to stay. She had telegraphed to the owner of the cottage, who had assured her she would have everything in readiness for her. Evening had now come and the sun was beginning to sink. By this time Mary Judson was showing signs of weariness, and Nancy was glad they were nearing the end of the journey.

“ Shall we be long before we get there, lass ? ” the woman asked ; “ I’m nearly done up.”

“ Another quarter of an hour,” cried Nancy. “ Here’s the motor-car waiting.”

What a long drive it was ! The car swept along the lanes she knew so well, while she heard the swish of the waves in the near distance. The primroses had nearly gone, but a hundred other wild flowers bedecked the hedges. The birds were twittering among the hazel-bushes, the lambs were frolicking in the meadows. She was in her own country at last ! A mile or so over the hills yonder was Trevanion Court, while all around her was the countryside she had known since childhood. She almost forgot Mary Judson in her excitement ; forgot everything save that she had come home, and that her heart was aching.

“ Ee-h ! But this is grand ! ” Mary Judson almost gasped the words.

They had come to the end of their journey before Nancy had realized it, and the car stopped at a little granite-built cottage from which a wide stretch of rugged coast scenery and the great rolling of the ocean could be seen.

Even to Nancy, who had seen it a hundred times before, it came like a revelation, but to the Yorkshire woman reared among the grey streets of Leeds it was beautiful beyond words.

"Yes, it is wonderful, isn't it?"

"Blackpool is nothing to that," admitted Mary Judson, "as for Scarborough, it's a fool to it. All the same, I do want a cup of tea, and then I'll go to bed."

"You are not as tired as you were, are you?"

"Nay. That ride in the car has refreshed me wonderfully. All the same, it's been a long, weary journey."

"You must stay in bed all day to-morrow," said Nancy.

"And what will you do?"

Nancy did not reply, but Miss Judson, unimaginative as she was, knew what was in the girl's mind.

CHAPTER XVIII

YOUNG JACK'S SUBTLETY

"**I** BE fine 'n glad to see 'ee, Miss Nancy, I be fer sure. You could 'ave knocked me down with a straw when I got your telegram, but I was as glad as ef anybody 'ad gived me a sovereign. There now, I 'ope you'll make a good mail. I 'ope your friend will too," she added, looking towards the Yorkshire woman. "You don't enjoy very good 'ealth, do 'ee, miss?"

Mrs. Uren had looked at Nancy very critically on her arrival. She had wondered much whether Squire Trevanion's daughter, as the villagers still called her, had prospered during her long absence, and had eagerly examined her clothes and judged accordingly. Mary Judson too came in for a close examination, and fell far short of what Mrs. Uren considered Miss Nancy's friend should be. The Yorkshire woman, according to the Cornish woman's ideas, hadn't the appearance of "a rail laady," and she was afraid lest Nancy had failed badly.

For the feudal spirit still remains in the rural parts of Cornwall. The people still look up to what they term "the old families," and treat them with due respect. Thus, although "Squire Trevanion," was only a farmer, and had been so poor when he died that the farm and its belongings had to be sold in order to pay his debts, he was still a Trevanion. The village women and girls curtsied to him to the very last, even although he was penniless, while they treated Jack Beel who had bought the farm as one of themselves. Money or no money, a Trevanion was a Trevanion; while Jack Beel, although he might possess millions, would be always treated as Jack Beel.

Mary Judson could not understand Mrs. Uren curtsying to Nancy on her arrival; could not understand her almost awed admiration at the girl's presence. In Leeds the standard of every man's worth was "t' brass" he had made; here there was another standard. In Leeds practically no man touched his hat to another man, and Mary Judson could not help noticing with something like contempt the politeness of the man who had driven their motor-car. For that matter Miss Judson was somewhat chagrined at the difference between Mrs. Uren's demeanour to Nancy and that shown toward herself.

"Isn't Mrs. Uren a dear?" remarked the girl when at length the woman left them.

"You might be the Queen of England from the way she treats you," was Miss Judson's reply.

"What do you mean?"

"Why, see the way she curtsies and scrapes to you. That kind of thing is nowt in my line."

"She's a dear," cried Nancy enthusiastically. "She was a servant at our house when I was a kiddy, and it's just lovely to be waited on by her again."

"Anyone might think you were made of different flesh and blood to other people by the way she looks at you. But there, I'm glad to see you happy, and I'm sure the place will do me good."

Directly after their homely meal Miss Judson went to bed, but Nancy, in spite of her long day's journey, felt that rest was impossible. She knew that she could not sleep if she went to bed, and so, directly after bidding her friend good night, she left the cottage and went out alone. The world was different here from what it was in Leeds, and as she drunk deep of the sea air, and entered into the spirit of the night, it seemed to her that her two years in Yorkshire had been a dream. Leeds, with its crowds, its rush, its roar, and its great busy life, did not exist save in her own imagination. She had simply been asleep for two years, and now she had awoke again, awoke in her own country. But she knew it was not so. Although

she was but little more than a mile from Trevanion Court, her old life had gone. Her home was the home of others, and she was no nearer realizing her dream than she had been two years before. She remembered the conditions of the sale; called to mind the option which she had insisted on, and at which Old Jack Beel had laughed.

Ten thousand pounds!

Yes, that was the price she had to pay if her old home was to be hers again, and that ten thousand pounds seemed as impossible as it did then.

No, it was not. If she would marry Ben Briggs everything would be possible. She had seen him less than a week before, and was sure by the look in his eyes that Ben had not given up hope of winning her as his wife.

How wonderful everything was! The moon was nearly at its full and the sky was cloudless. In the near distance she heard the waves breaking on perhaps the finest coast line in the world. She had bathed a hundred times on the sandy beach hundreds of feet down, a beach so hard that people often played tennis there. No, there was no other place like it. As for the lane in which she walked, it was a dream of paradise. She heard the birds nestling among the leafy bushes, heard the wind sighing among the rustling leaves. The air she breathed was as sweet as the nectar of the gods. But more than all it was home; the spirit of home wrapped her around like a mantle.

She found herself sobbing like a child, while the tears coursed down her cheeks. They were not tears of sorrow; never did joy fill her heart more than then; every pulse of her body thrilled its recognition of the fact that she was in her own homeland even although her home did not belong to her. . . .

For hours after she went to bed she lay awake thinking, dreaming, planning. On the whole she was sorry she had brought Miss Judson with her. This woman, kind and good as she was, could not enter into her feelings, and but for the fact that she knew the holiday would do her good she wished herself alone. Would her visit result in any-

thing? Could it be that her homecoming would help her?

She fell asleep at last, but it was only to dream of her childhood's days. Her father was with her again just as he had been in the olden times. She saw his face beaming with smiles, yet anxious looking, as on her nineteenth birthday he had given her a new horse. How her father had loved her! Then in her dream she saw him lying on his death-bed, heard him pleading with her to keep the old house in the family.

When at length she awoke she could hardly realize where she was. Bright sunshine was streaming in through the window, the song of the birds came to her, while the murmur of the sea seemed like far-off music. Then suddenly she realized, and leaping out of bed rushed to the window.

A few minutes later she was running down the precipitous path towards the sea. She laughed for very joy as she saw the morning sunshine on the many-coloured waters. She gave a little scream of delight as she plunged from a rugged rock into twenty feet of water and then rising to the surface swam seaward. She had not had a sea bath for two years, and the joy of it was almost beyond words.

"I am simply ravenous, Mrs. Uren," she cried when she came back to the cottage again. "Is breakfast ready?"

"I can soon get it for 'ee. What'll 'ee be pleased to 'ave?"

"Oh, anything as long as there's plenty of it."

The woman laughed with pleasure. This was the girl she had known long years before.

"Tedn' the pilchard season yet," she remarked, "but I see'd Bill Boskiddy a few minutes ago, and 'ee said 'ee'd caught some. Will 'ee 'ave they?"

"Pilchards!" cried Nancy. "I'd love them!"

"After that I'll toast 'ee a bit of 'ome-cured 'am I've got and then you can finish up with a bit of bread and cream and blackberry jelly. Will that do?"

"It's just what I've longed for for the last two years," cried Nancy.

"Oa, but 'tes good to see 'ee again, Miss Nancy. I spoase your friend ed'n comin' down to breakfast?"

"No, I told her she must stay in bed till noon. She was very tired last night."

"She ded look wisht for sure; but a week or two 'ere'll set 'er up. I took the liberty of looking into 'er room just now, and she was slaapin' as quiet as a baby. Will'ee wait in for 'er?"

"Not this morning," replied Nancy, and there was a far-away look in her eyes.

"What be 'ee goin' to do then?"

Nancy gave no answer to this, but the woman guessed by her tremulous lips what she was thinking of.

By nine o'clock Nancy had left the cottage again and was on her way to Trevanion Court. She feared to go there, but she could not help herself, the place drew her like a magnet.

Presently she left the lane and struck into a footpath across the fields, until after a few minutes' walk she found herself on land which up to two years ago she had called her own. Then, unable to control herself, she started running, until having reached the crest of the hill the old homestead burst upon her gaze. She could not see the house plainly, the trees which embowered it hid parts of it from her sight; but it was there. She saw some of the old stone chimneys and traced the outlines of the buildings. Imagination and memory did the rest.

A minute later she was walking under the avenue of trees she remembered so well, which led up to the entrance gateway. When she had been a girl it had been a well-kept drive, now it was a deeply rutted, rough farmer's lane. Still, the trees were the same, and the panorama of hill and dale could not be altered.

She shrunk from going nearer, but found herself rapidly making her way towards the entrance gate. Yes, there

it was! The great lichen-covered granite pillars surmounted by huge rounded granite stones. Beyond the gate stretched the greensward where she had so often romped as a child, and farther on still stood the house. She gazed like one spell-bound. She had had a fear lest somehow it should appear changed; feared lest what she had thought so beautiful should seem different. She knew the house would not be really different, but she might see with new eyes and thus alter everything. But it was not so. The pillared portico was just as she had left it—save that two farm carts had been drawn up there. What sacrilege! Those flagstones on which the farm carts stood, had been trodden, centuries before, by beauteous ladies and gaily attired cavaliers. She saw the leaded windows which belonged to the room where she had slept, and wondered who slept there now; saw the wing of the house where King Charles I had slept during the time of his struggle against Cromwell—saw everything.

For minutes she stood looking, unconscious of who might be near. She was peopling the rooms; recalling from the dim past the events with which the old house was associated; remembering what her father had said, and what she had promised.

“Why! Miss Nancy!”

It was an exclamation of joy, and yet the voice sounded harsh and discordant. Turning, she saw Young Jack Beel standing by her side.

She couldn't deny it: Young Jack had improved. Whether residence at Trevanion Court had had its effect upon him she did not know, but he seemed to have more *savoir faire*, was more a man of the world than when she had seen him last. He dressed better too. He wore a pair of well-made riding breeches and a carefully fitting coat. The truth was Young Jack had heard she was coming to Cornwall and had donned his best attire in the hope that she would visit Trevanion Court.

“I am glad to see you, Miss Nancy,” he said with eager, yet anxious eyes; “no one knows how glad. You are

staying with Dorcas Uren, aren't you? Father and I were passing her house yesterday morning and she told us. You don't look as well as you did when you left," he added.

"Leeds is a great smoky city," cried the girl, "and I've been working very hard."

"Working! *You* working! Why——"

"Yes, I've a situation there."

"You—you a situation!" he almost gasped. "What do you do?"

"I am a designer for a firm of manufacturers," she answered him.

The words conveyed little meaning to his mind, the language of Yorkshire was strange to him.

"I hope you are doing well?" he ventured. "That is, I hope—— What a lovely morning it is, isn't it? Won't you come inside and look round?" he added.

Nancy shook her head.

"Everything is the same as you left it," he went on; "that is, as near as I can make it. The panelling hasn't been taken away or anything of that sort."

"Of course, that was the arrangement, wasn't it?" and the girl's voice became hard and metallic.

"Does it look natural to you?" persisted Young Jack, following her eager gaze.

"It's sacrilege," shouted Nancy angrily.

"What's sacrilege?"

"To have those heavy carts placed under the portico. You must have known——" She did not finish the sentence. After all, what right had she to complain?

"I'll have them taken away at once," said Young Jack humbly. "I didn't think you would care, and it seemed such a handy place to put them. You are sure you won't go into the house?"

Again Nancy shook her head. At that moment she hated Young Jack Beel.

"Come along to the stables, then," he persisted.

"I'd rather not, thank you."

"Do," he pleaded. "I want to show you something." He spoke mysteriously.

"What do you want to show me?"

"You remember your mare, don't you—Phoebe I mean, the hunter your father bought for you years ago?"

"Phoebe!" cried the girl. "Is she there?"

"Why, don't you know? I bought her at the sale. I knew how you loved her, so although Nick Bodinnick and Harry Magor both wanted her badly I bought her. She wasn't two when your father bought her first and now she's rising seven. I've been offered big money for her, but I wouldn't take it. Do you know why?"

The girl's lips became tremulous. Her heart was almost broken when she had said good-bye to Phoebe.

"I bought her because you loved her," said Young Jack in a whisper, "and no one has been on her back since you left."

"Do you mean that?"

"What else can I mean?"

Her voice softened into gratitude, and Young Jack was quick to note the change.

"Phoebe was *your* mare," he said; "how then could I allow anyone else to ride her? Father's been awfully vexed with me, but I didn't care. I've exercised her nearly every day, but no one has ever ridden her. I bought your saddle too. Do you remember? Won't you come for a ride on her this morning, Miss Nancy? I'd love to take you. It would seem like old times again to see you flying across the country on Phoebe's back. I don't call her *my* mare," went on Jack, "in my heart of hearts I call her Miss Nancy's mare, and I look forward to the time when you will come and claim her as your own. I had the same loose box fitted up for her too, and there isn't a horse in Cornwall better housed than she is. Won't you come and see if she knows you?"

Young Jack was wiser than he knew; nothing that he could have done to soften her heart towards him would have been more effective than this. Phoebe, the mare

her father had given her on her nineteenth birthday, the mare on which she had followed the hounds, the mare which she had loved almost as a human being !

Almost before she knew what she was doing she was accompanying Jack towards the stables, talking eagerly the whole time. "What's that ?" she asked as they came close to the stable door.

"It's Phoebe whinnying," replied Jack ; "she's heard your voice and remembers."

Almost forgetful of everything now she rushed to the stable door and opened it. A minute later she had entered Phoebe's box.

"Phoebe, my darling, do you remember me ?"

There was no need to ask that. The mare's body quivered with joy as she felt her soft hand against her velvety nose, and whinnied with gladness as she heard her voice.

"Oh, my beauty, my beauty !" cried the girl as she rubbed her face against the mare's nostrils. "I'm glad you haven't forgotten me."

Forgotten her ! If any living creature could show signs of affection, Phoebe did towards her one-time mistress. Her whinnying was like a human voice telling of her love.

"She looks well, don't she ?" asked Young Jack, who had watched the meeting. "I've groomed her myself, and fed her always myself. I've not allowed one of our farm labbuts¹ to go near her. Yes, and I've cleaned out her box myself. Do you know why I've done it ? I've done it in the hope that you would know, and that you would think kindly of me."

"I *do* think kindly of you," Nancy could not help saying. "I did not know you had bought Phoebe, and I've wondered ~~hundreds~~ of times what had become of her."

"She's waiting for you," cried Jack, "and she'll be always here until you come to claim her as your own. You are sure you won't go into the house, Miss Nancy ?"

"No, no, I could not bear it."

"But why ? It's yours when you will have it."

¹ Yokels, or farm labourers.

Jack Beel was a dangerous wooer at that moment. Under ordinary circumstances Nancy would never have thought of him, but now he was a link to her old life, a means whereby she could again possess her old home. But more than that, Young Jack had been kind to Phoebe, cared for her, groomed her, exercised her, all because of the mare's love for her one-time mistress.

"Let's go for a ride," pleaded Jack again. "I keep a good saddle-horse of my own and we can go anywhere you like. There, that's your old saddle, isn't it?"

"No, no, I daren't! thank you so much, but I daren't!" and she rushed out of the box while Phoebe whinnied mournfully after her.

She had barely reached the stable yard when she heard the rushing patter of feet and the savage growl of a dog. A few seconds later the growl had changed into a joyful cry of welcome.

"Why, it's John," cried the girl. "John, you remember me, don't you? Yes, you do, my beauty!" Nancy sobbed as the huge Airédale placed its paws on her shoulders and began to lick her face. "Why, you've got John too," she went on as she looked gratefully at the young farmer.

"Of course I have. Do you think I'd let anyone else have him? I wasn't going to buy him—in fact I knew nothing about him until I heard one of the farm-men say on the day of the sale, 'That's Miss Nancy's dog. It'll break her heart to leave him.' So of course I bought him," concluded Jack simply.

"Oh, you *are* good!" ejaculated the girl. "You seem to have thought of everything I liked."

"You know why, don't you?" pleaded the young farmer. "It wasn't because I wanted either the horse or the dog, but—but— Oh, you know why!"

Of course she did. She could not help remembering what he had said to her on the day she had left; called to mind his pleadings on the night he and his father had visited her after her own father's funeral.

Every girl loves to be loved, and there are but few in the wide world who are not influenced by the knowledge that a man loves her. They may not return the love—indeed, they may laugh at it; but they are pleased with the knowledge that they possess it. Indeed, just then Jack Beel appealed far more strongly to Nancy than Ben Briggs did. She could not help comparing them, for she knew that both loved her. She thought of Ben's wooing, remembered the determined manner with which he approached her. Ben in his own way was a strong man, possessing all the virility, the doggedness, and the determination so characteristic of Yorkshiremen. He was one who never gave up hope, and did not know when he was beaten. He was very popular too, and knew how to dress well. Altogether Ben was what was called an eligible young man. But he was a townsman who knew nothing about horses or dogs; indeed, country life was an unexplained riddle to him. Jack Beel might be less a gentleman, and having but a slender education he was in many ways inferior to Ben; all the same, he was a man more after her own heart.* He knew the country and loved it, while dogs and horses loved him.*

But more than all this he lived at Trevanion Court; he owned the house and fields she had called hers, and he was wanting her to come back to them. He had bought Phoebe and John too, for her sake, and the girl's heart thrilled with gratitude at the thought of it.

Yes, at that moment she thought more kindly of Jack than of Ben, and looking at his stalwart limbs and sun-burnt, kindly face, she could not help admitting that he made a fine figure of a man.

And each of them offered her what she wanted; each of them told her that if she would marry him her old home would be hers again. Perhaps Ben's was the more flattering offer, for he had told her on the day she wedded him he would place the deeds of the old homestead and farm in her hands. But in that case she would have to live in Yorkshire and come to her own home only on an occa-

sional visit. And she didn't want to live in Yorkshire. She was a Cornish girl, a child of many generations of Cornish people, and possessed the oldest name in the county. Jack Beel, on the other hand, pleaded with her to come home to live.

Yes, these were the means by which her dreams could be fulfilled, and by which she could keep her promise to her father. She saw no other way of fulfilling that promise. She remembered the option which she had insisted on two years before; but it was useless to her because it was so madly impossible. How could she get ten thousand pounds? She might as well try to get the King's crown. And all the time her promise to her father seemed to be written in letters of fire upon her brain.

The alternatives stood out before her stark and forbidding. She must marry either one of these two men, or she must fail in her promise. Fail, too, in possessing what was nearest and dearest to her.

But the price!

She would have to give herself—herself! Well, why not? Hundreds of girls were doing it every day. What, after all, was marriage but a bargain, a bargain between a man and a woman? The man on his side offered home, protection, perhaps wealth, while the woman—

No, she could not do it; she would rather die. But if she didn't? In that case her old home, the home which was as dear to her as her eyesight, would remain the property of Jack Beel.

"Won't you come and look at the lily pond?" asked Young Jack. "It's glorious just now. There are just thousands upon thousands of arum lilies in full bloom. You remember it, don't you?"

Remember it! She had pictured it a thousand times during the last two years, and yielding to sudden temptation she took a step towards the garden.

A second later she stopped suddenly. Coming into the stable yard was Old Jack Beel.

CHAPTER XIX

HOW OLD JACK SUPPORTED HIS SON

OLD Jack looked at her critically. He had fully expected her to be there, and had come that morning for the purpose of talking to her. Dorcas Uren had told him on the previous day that Nancy was coming, and he felt sure that she would make her way to her old home. He had been greatly displeased with his son during the last two years. He had, as he had told Nancy, picked out a wife for Young Jack, a buxom farmer's daughter who would have made an excellent farmer's wife, and he had hoped that after Nancy had gone his son would come to his senses and do as he wanted. But Young Jack had remained obdurate. He refused even to look at Selina Nancarrow, and in spite of all the arguments which the old man could urge, he made no progress.

"Miss Nancy's the only one in the world for me, father," Young Jack had argued. "I care more for one lock of her glossy hair than for all Selina Nancarrow can give me."

"Why, you booba," snarled the old man, "what's the good of talking like that ef she waan't 'ave 'ee? Besides, what es she? Jest a fine-fingered young thing who would be nothin' but a burden to 'ee. What can she do? She caan't milk a cow, scald a pan of milk, or make a pound of butter."

"I shouldn't want her to," replied Young Jack. "It's no use, father, there is no other maid in the world for me."

Old Jack realized the truth of this, and because he loved his son so dearly he was willing to give up all his own hopes that the boy of his heart might be happy. That

was why, when he heard of Nancy's visit to Cornwall, he made his way to Trevanion Court.

"It's a good sign," he said to himself as he saw them together. "Perhaps after oal the boy's right. 'Ee do want to be a gentleman and I do want 'n to be a gentleman. Everybody do think of'n now as Old Jack Beel's son, but ef 'ee could marry she they would think of'n as Miss Trevanion's 'usband."

Yes, she was different from any other girl of his acquaintance. It was true she looked rather pale and wan, and the clothes she wore were simple enough, and yet she was far removed from such girls as Selina Nancarrow. Why it was he did not know. It was not that she was so much better looking, and certainly it was not because she was more richly dressed; but there was something—an indescribable something. . . .

Old Jack was not given to analysing his thoughts or impressions, but he was far from being a fool.

"It's the deference between a thoroughbred and a cart-horse," he reflected. "After all, there is something in birth and breedin'. She's a Trevanion, and my boy Jack is Jack Beel's son. There's the deference."

He felt chagrined and angry, but he had to admit it, and a great longing came into his heart for Young Jack's success. Not that he was going to stand any nonsense. He was as good as any Trevanion in the world, and he would let her know it if necessity occurred. All the same, he would do his best for his son, and the fact that she had come to see her old home made the opportunity seem favourable.

"Mornin', my dear," he greeted her. "You cudd'n' keep away, then?"

"Good morning, Mr. Beel. No, I couldn't keep away."

"Well, it do look purty, I can't 'elp admittin' that; but law, I made a poor bargain when I bought it."

"Did you? I am sorry for that."

"Why, of course I did. I'd' make it out this way. Money is wuth seven per cent, and eight thousand pound

at seven per cent is five 'undred and sixty pound a year. Tha's 'rithmetic, edn' it ? "

" Yes, that's arithmetic," assented Nancy.

" Well, es this plaace wuth five 'undred and sixty pound a year? 'Course tedn'. Ef the boy 'ad 'ad to pay that money for it, 'ee'd be be'ind in 'is rent ; but there, I don't begrudge 'n it ef it'll maake 'n 'appy. 'Ee's my only boy, my onnly cheeld in fact, and I'd want to maake'n 'appy. I caan't live so much longer now. I be ovver seventy, and although I be sound in wind and limb, I can't live more'n a vew years in the course of nature."

" Why, you look good for another thirty years yet," responded Nancy, who had determined to be pleasant to the old man.

" Do I ? Well, I bean't. But mind this, my dear ; every penny I've got 'll go to Young Jack 'ere ; and when I'd' die 'ee'll be one of the richest men in Cornwall. It do seem strange doan't it, but a little more'n fifty year agone I was a groom in these very stables. Think of it, I worked 'ere for your gran'father and your father, and now I be the owner of it all. Tell'ee what, my dear, the maid that gits Young Jack 'll be 'ucky."

" Now, father ! " protested Young Jack.

" Wha's the good of saying ' Now, father ' ? ' Tes true, edn' it ? I don't b'lieve in baatin' round the bush. Go straight for your 'edges, I'd say. You do still love the old plaace, don't ee ? " and he turned towards Nancy again.

" Wouldn't you if you were me ? " asked the girl.

" Aas, I s'pose I should. I'd' remember your grand-father when 'ee lived 'ere. Aw, 'ee was as proud as Lucifer 'ee was, and 'ee treated me as though I was dirt ; but 'ee loved the ould place. So did your father, ded'n a ? " and he saw the girl's lips quiver as he spoke. " You'd still like to 'ave et as your own again, I reckon," and he looked at her keenly.

Nancy did not speak, but her eyes answered him.

" Well, you'd know ow you can git et."

"Yes, I know," and Nancy's voice was hard. "I remember the option."

"I wadn' thinking of that," replied Old Jack. "I 'ad an aasier way in my mind than that; but there—Aas, there was the option. Well, two of the five year be gone. Do 'ee see your way to take up the option?"

Nancy shook her head.

Old Jack laughed good humouredly. "Ten thousand pound," he chuckled. "'Tes a lot of money, edn' it? And you've got only three year more to git it in. Do 'ee see any chance of doin' et?"

There was a taunt in the old man's voice, and it aroused Nancy's anger. Hitherto she had listened to him kindly. She remembered his upbringing, and the story of his life, and was ready to forgive his coarseness and vulgarity. More than that, she remembered that Young Jack had bought Phœbe that no one else might have her, and she had been grateful as a consequence. But now she felt that the old man was wounding her intentionally, and taunting her with her poverty. All the pride of her nature was aroused, and she would not let this vulgar old parvenu know how hopeless she was.

"Oh yes, I shall get it," she replied.

"Git ten thousand pounds? 'Ow, I should like to know?"

"Surely that's my business. Of this you may be certain, I shall take up the option."

"You'll buy back the plaace in three year from now?"

"Certainly."

"Why, 'ow can 'ee do it? You be working for a weekly wage, bean't 'ee? 'Ow can anybody working for a weekly wage git ten thousand pound?"

"I could get it to-morrow if I wanted it," flashed out the girl.

She had not meant to say this at all, but the words escaped her lips before she knew.

"Git it to-morra, cud 'ee?" said the old man reflectively. Then his eyes flashed.

He had a keen, quick mind, and he was not long in coming to his conclusions. He looked at Nancy again ; noted her striking appearance ; instinctively felt her charm, her air of distinction. He had heard that Yorkshire was a county of rich men ; that fabulous fortunes were made in the woollen industry. Could it be that Nancy had fascinated some rich young fellow in the North who wanted her to marry him ? Was that in her mind ? If so, his boy's chances were not as good as he had thought. He was angry with himself for having bought the place while that option hung over his head. Then his mind started working on another line. If Nancy could, by marrying a rich Yorkshireman, get the ten thousand pounds, why hadn't she married him ? No, no, he didn't believe a word of it ; all the same he must be careful, and he must find out.

" 'Ow be 'ee liking Yorkshire, then ? " he asked after a somewhat painful silence.

" In some ways I like it very much."

" Nice people up there ? "

" Very nice indeed."

" Which do 'ee like best, Cornwall or Yorkshire ? 'Ave 'ee ever seen a place like this there ? "

It was a wise question on Old Jack's part, for in spite of her anger at his taunt, she was keenly susceptible to home influences at that moment. The sight of Trevanion Court had acted upon her like a charm and made her feel more than ever that there was no place in the world like it.

" Cornwall !—Yorkshire ! " she cried. " Why, there's no comparison ! "

" Then you bean't thinkin' of settlin' down up there ? "

" Do you think I could, Mr. Beel ? I'd rather live on a crust here in my old home, than have wealth untold in Yorkshire."

" Well then, why doan't 'ee, my dear ? Everybody would be glad to 'ave 'ee back. Why, even I, who do own this place, feel that things bean't fitty while you be away. You do too. don't 'ee. Jack ? "

But Young Jack wisely made no reply. He had been on tenterhooks all the time his father had been speaking, and was fearful lest he should say something that would destroy all his hopes.

"I would do anything for my boy," went on the old man; "and look 'ere, you'd' knaw what 'ee'd' want. Wha's the use of waitin' any longer? Now you be 'ere, stay 'ere," and his voice became wheedling.

"Good morning, Mr. Beel, I must be going now. I've a friend staying with me at Dorcas Uren's cottage and she'll be wondering what's become of me."

"Why, there's no ¹pore," urged the old man. "Now you be 'ere, stay 'ere and look round a bit. I've made a lot of improvements 'pon the place, I tell 'ee; and I'll say this for my boy 'ere; 'ee've a farmed it well. Come and look at the crops. Plaise God we shall 'ave a grand 'arvest this year. Come up and 'ave a look at the thirty-acre field; there edn' a finer lot of sheep in Cornwall than is there."

"Not this morning, thank you," said the girl resolutely. "I must get back to my friend."

"And 'ow long be 'ee stayin', makin' sa bould?"

"I've arranged to stay a month."

"And be 'ee going back to Yorkshire when the month's up?"

"Yes."

"Ah. Well, three year'll soon slip away, and when the option's gone, 'tes gone for ever. Mind that."

The words sounded like a threat, as indeed they were meant to be. But Nancy seemed to pay no heed.

"Oh, I shall be ready with the ten thousand pounds before the three years are up," she replied proudly.

"What, oal yer oan money?"

"Certainly, it will be my own money."

"Because," said Old Jack, like one reflecting, "ef you've got ten thousand pound of somebody else's money, 'twouldn' be like your oan, wud et?"

• Hurry.

Why it, was she did not know, but the words wounded her. Supposing she married Ben Briggs, and supposing he gave her Trevanion Court as a wedding present, it wouldn't be as though she had bought it with her own money; in fact, the joy of possessing it would be diminished to a vanishing point. It would not be hers, it would be Ben's; for she would belong to Ben, and Ben as a consequence would have a proprietary right in it.

"You remember what I told you two years agone, doan't 'ee?" and Old Jack took a step nearer her. "It would 'urt me terble, but I would do it for 'is sake and your sake. Ef you'd marry my boy you needn' change your name—'ee'd be willing to change 'is,—so that," and he dropped his voice to a whisper, "ef you 'ad cheldern the name wud continue. Think 'bout it, my dear; think 'bout it."

Nancy rushed away without speaking another word, and the two men watched her as she hurried down the drive. She had not gone far before she heard pattering feet at her side and felt something cold and wet in her hand. Turning she saw that John, the dog, had followed her.

"John! John! John! Come 'ere?" she heard Old Jack shouting. But John kept by her side.

"Do you want to stay with me, old dear?" said the girl, patting the dog's head.

John barked affectionately, and looking up at the girl's face his great brown eyes gave her his answer.

"Let him call!" she laughed. "You shall go with me if you want to," and she continued her way towards the entrance gate, while the dog kept beside her.

"Be 'ee goin' to 'low that, Jack?" asked the old man, who had continued watching the two.

"Allow what?"

"Low 'er to slock away your dog."

"She can slock away what she do mind to," replied Jack. "Don't you see, father? John won't come back till she brings him back, and then——"

Both men continued silent for some time, then Old Jack broke out again.

"Praps you be right," he said. "She may be a spitfire, and no doubt she's as proud as Lucifer; but she's a grand maid. I should like 'ee to 'ave her, my boy."

"I *will* have her! By hook or by crook I will have her. When she comes again I'll get her to fix it up. But you mustn't be here."

"Why mustn't I be here?"

"You'd spoil everything. You've nearly spoilt everything this morning."

"'Ow?"

"By the way you talked to her. You made her vexed; you taunted her with not having got the money. That's not the way to treat a maid of that sort."

Old Jack was silent a few seconds, and then laughed scornfully.

"Look 'ere, my boy, I ain't lived more'n seventy year for nothin'. People used to say that yer mawther was the moast defficult woman in Cornwall to manage; but I managed 'er. I d'know what women be, and 'ow much they'll stand, and I've done more than you'd think this mornin' in gittin' 'er for 'ee."

"But father——"

"'Ould yer gab and doan't be a booba!" and Old Jack went away in high dudgeon towards the thirty-acre field.

During the next three days Nancy did not go near Trevanion Court. She gave her whole time to Miss Mary Judson, thereby hoping to forget the problem which lay before her. All in vain, however. The very air she breathed was a constant reminder of her promise to her father, and the panorama of the hill and dale was ever telling her of the one great desire of her heart. It came to pass, therefore, that on the morning of the fourth day of her stay in Cornwall she could not resist Miss Judson's plea to take her to her old home.

"Remember, it's more than two miles," Nancy said.
"Are you strong enough to go so far?"

"Strong enough?" repeated the Yorkshire woman. "Why, I feel a new woman. You know what I was like before I came here, just like a bit of chewed string; and now I feel game for anything."

"You certainly look better."

"Better? Why, it's just wonderful. When you used to tell me about the Cornish air, and the Cornish sea, I didn't believe you; but it's grand, just grand. Not that I would like to live here," she added; "to me there's no place like Leeds; but for a change it's wonderful. Besides, you promised to take me to your old home and I should feel that something was wanting if I didn't go."

After breakfast, therefore, the two women wended their way towards the spot which Nancy loved so much, while John followed closely at his mistress's heels, for the dog would not leave her. More than once she had—in a half-hearted manner, it is true—commanded him to return home, but the dog, after making a pretence of obeying her, always returned to her again.

"Ay, that dog is fond of you," remarked Miss Judson.

"Not fonder than I am of him. I reared him from a puppy."

"Won't the farmer think it strange—your keeping him?"

Nancy did not reply. She had not yet told Miss Judson of Young Jack's hopes.

Presently they reached the crest of the hill where Trevanion Court suddenly burst upon their view.

"Is that it?" asked Miss Judson excitedly.

Nancy could only nod.

"Ay, it's rare and bonnie," exclaimed the woman. "Let's go nearer."

"I daren't," replied the girl, "I simply daren't. I went there on the morning after we came and it almost broke my heart."

"Then I'll go by myself, I will for sure," and the Yorkshire woman, suiting action to word, made her way toward the house, while Nancy, seated on a stile with John

lying at her feet, looked with hungry eyes towards her old home.

To tell the truth Nancy was more than ordinarily sad that morning. Not only was she utterly hopeless, she was also disappointed. While in Leeds she had written to John Trefry telling him that she was coming to Cornwall, and also informing him that she was going to stay at Dorcas Uren's cottage, and John had taken no notice of her letter. During the last two years they had occasionally corresponded, and while John's letters were always cordial and friendly they told of nothing else, and it seemed more than strange to the girl that he had not come to see her.

"Surely," she said to herself again and again, "he could at least have dropped a line; and now, knowing as he does that I am here in the county, it isn't even polite, to use no stronger term, not to take any notice of my letter."

Nancy had for years looked upon John as her best friend. As we have said earlier in these pages, John was a quiet, unobtrusive young man, possessing no brilliant qualities, nor any great hopes of future success. But he was as honest as the day, and Nancy had always looked upon him as the one who understood her position better, and entered more truly into her feelings, than anyone else. That was why she was so disappointed and hurt at his silence. She could not understand an old friend, after two years' absence, being within a few miles of her, and yet not taking any notice of her.

She was also more than ordinarily hopeless about the fulfilment of her promise to her father. Never had the old place looked so fair and so desirable, and yet never did her chances of winning it back seem so remote.

"Ay, I don't wonder at you a bit, Nancy."

Miss Judson had returned to her side without her knowing it.

"Did you go into the house?"

"Nay, but I went all round it. I never saw such a place: never. And you say it's always belonged to your family?"

"It's more than three hundred years ago since my people built it," said the girl proudly.

"More than three hundred years?"

"Yes, more than three hundred years. And the present house was built on the site of a still older one," she added. "Perhaps it seems a poor thing to boast about, but we Trevanions can trace our ancestry back before the time of Edward the Confessor. And there was a Trevanion Court even in his day."

"Ay," repeated the Yorkshire woman, "I make little of old families as a rule, but this place fair gets hold of me. And you say the option lasts for another three years?"

"Another three years," repeated the girl.

"And you've got to get ten thousand pounds in order to take up the option?"

Nancy nodded.

"Ay, if I could make it!—if I only *could*!" and Mary Judson's lips were tremulous as she spoke. "We *must* do it and we *will* do it," she went on. "I feel as though I can now. I was right run down when I came, but I'm getting stronger every day. When we go back to Leeds—— Ay, Nancy, don't cry," for tears were running down the girl's face.

"It seems so hopeless, so utterly hopeless," she said.

"And you promised your father?"

"Yes, I promised him when he was dying."

"Ay, we'll do it; we *will* do it! I know just how you feel, and we will. It'll be the proudest day of my life when I can make you a present of it."

Nancy made no reply, save to look with aching eyes towards the old lichen-covered buildings, which were embowered among the trees.

"Supposing we fail in that—mind, we won't—but supposing we do; is there any other way of doing it? Ten thousand pounds is a lot of brass," she added.

"Yes, there is another way."

"What?"

Nancy was silent a few seconds; then she burst out

almost passionately. "Look here, Mary, what would you do if you were in my place? You've seen my old home and you know what I've promised; would you, if you could fulfil the promise in no other way, marry a man you didn't care anything about?"

"What man?" asked Miss Judson.

"That's what I'm going to tell you."

CHAPTER XX

JOHN TREFRY AND JACK BEEL

"**I**S it Ben Briggs?" asked the Yorkshire woman.
"What makes you ask that?"

"Ay, I've seen him casting sheep's eyes at you, and I know he would give his eyes to get you. Has he asked you?"

"He would give it me as a wedding present," replied the girl, with a bitter laugh.

"Well, and why not? Ben Briggs is a gradely lad, he's a partner in one of the most flourishing firms in Yorkshire, and ten thousand pounds would be nothing to him. He's a good lad, too. Straight as a die, and has a good position in Leeds., He'll be Lord Mayor of the city some day."

"But I don't love him," cried Nancy.

"Dost 'a love anyone else, lass?" and the woman lapsed into the Yorkshire speech.

Nancy shook her head.

"Well then, why not? Mind, I'm going to have another try first, and I'm going to succeed—but after all, why not?"

"Then you would advise me to marry Ben?"

"You might do worse."

"Even though I don't love him? Think Mary, I should be selling myself; I should be giving myself to a man, body and soul, because he can buy *that* back," and she looked toward the house. "Do you advise me to do that?"

"I don't know," said the woman thoughtfully. "Being an old maid is a weary business, Nancy, lass. To live

year in and year out with no one to love you . . . and yet I don't know."

"There is another," went on Nancy after a long silence.

"Another! Who? Do I know him?"

"The man who owns Trevanion Court."

"What's he like? Is he a tall big young chap about seven and twenty with a tanned face, and a thick mop of hair?"

"Have you seen him? Did he speak to you?"

"If it's the man I mean, he rode by me as I was standing at the gate half an hour ago. He didn't speak to me, but looked at me as though I were trespassing. One of the men called him Master Jack. Is that he?"

"He asked me on the day my father died," replied the girl. "I suppose he's terribly fond of me, too. He bought this dog for me; bought my mare Phoebe too, so that he might keep her for me."

"And he wants you badly?"

"Oh, don't let's talk of it!" cried the girl, rising hastily to her feet; "it seems awful even to think of such a thing. And yet I feel I would do anything rather than—disappoint father. I know it's awful of me to say so, Mary, but if we can't make rubber, I feel I shall have to marry one of those two men."

"Which?" asked Miss Judson.

"I don't know; it doesn't seem to matter to me which."

"Look here, Nancy lass," burst out Miss Judson when some minutes later they were wending their way back to Dorcas Uren's cottage, "would you feel if you married either Ben Briggs or yon farmer chap that the place would be really your own?"

"I don't know," cried the girl slowly, "that's why I am so hopeless."

"But you mustn't be hopeless. Directly we get back to Leeds, we will start all over again; and we'll make it, aye we *will*!—And then the place will be really your own."

After lunch Nancy went down to the seashore, an-

accompanied by Miss Judson, and there, for the thousandth time she considered the problem before her. She had no hope of Miss Judson ever succeeding in carrying out her plans. What had been a far-off dream for years was a far-off dream still. There seemed no more likelihood of rubber being made synthetically, than of transforming the sand upon the seashore into gold. It was true she loved neither of the two men who wanted to marry her, but she loved her old home with a love almost amounting to a passion. She remembered her promise to her father, and her determination never to rest until Trevanion Court again belonged to her. Was there any other means by which this could come to pass? She knew of none. And yet to get what she wanted by marrying either Ben Briggs or Jack Beel seemed degradation. Would it not be better to let the old place remain in the hands of a stranger than to get it back by what was nothing less than sacrilege?

"But I promised father," she said to herself pitifully, "and oh, I feel as though I would give my immortal soul to have it again—for my very own!"

She remembered what Young Jack had said to her. Yes, there was no doubt about it, he was deeply in love with her. He was willing to change his name too, and thus Trevanion Court would still belong to a Trevanion.

As she made her way back to Dorcas Uren's cottage her mind was almost made up.

She had barely entered the house when she heard a voice that caused her heart to throb violently, and sent the blood rushing to her face.

"Why, John!" she cried as she entered the room.

John Trefry rose to his feet and came towards her, but he did not speak; he seemed to be fighting with some great emotion.

"We've introduced ourselves," Mary Judson informed her. "He came here half an hour since, and when he didn't find you he had to put up with me."

"But I expected you days ago, John!" cried Nancy. "Didn't you get my letter?"

Yes, John admitted that her letter had arrived all right, and then went on to tell her in a confused sort of way that he had been very busy. He was doubtless ill at ease, and constantly excused himself, first for not coming before, and again for coming at all.

"We'll have tea right away," cried Nancy. "I'm too glad to see you, John, to reproach you for neglecting me."

"Neglecting you?" queried the young fellow.

"Of course you've neglected me," cried Nancy brightly.

"Fancy waiting four days before paying me a visit, knowing all the time that I came here partly because of you."

John Trefry was very reticent. Nancy introduced a dozen subjects, but he seemed interested in nothing; indeed, so dull and distant was he that Mary Judson formed a poor opinion of him.

"Most of these Cornish folk have plenty to say for themselves," thought the Yorkshire woman, "but this lad is a ninney. I wonder that Nancy ever made a friend of him."

And yet she couldn't help liking him, and she confessed to Nancy afterwards that he was the kind of young man one could trust.

"Who is he?" she asked, "and what does he do?"

"He's something in an electrical works," replied Nancy.

"Then he's no brass?"

"No, he's awfully poor. All his people are dead. The Trefrys are something like the Trevanions, they have nearly all died out. Once they were a great people in the county and owned a lot of land, but they lost it all. Still," she added, "John Trefry is a gentleman."

"Ay," cried the Yorkshire woman, "anyone can see that. At first I thought he was not all there, he was so shy and gawky, but I soon found out my mistake. He's not much to say for himself, but he's not a lad you can take liberties with."

"He's the best friend I have in the world," cried Nancy, "and he was more comfort to me than anyone else when my father died."

The Yorkshire woman looked at her keenly.

"Only a friend?" she asked.

"That's all," replied the girl, "but a real friend."

This conversation had taken place after tea, while John was out in the kitchen talking with Mr. and Mrs. Uren.

"I noticed as how Mrs. Uren seemed to think a lot of him," and Miss Judson spoke reflectively. "She treated him just as she treats you. I thought, first of all, from the way she spoke to him that he might be a lord or something of that sort. I was surprised when he told me he worked for his living. And yet he has a way with him," she added. "He's not a common lad."

John returned to the room at that moment, whereupon Mary Judson prepared to go out.

"You two will have a lot to say to each other," said the Yorkshire woman significantly, "and I don't want to be in the way."

"John, why are you acting so strangely?" asked Nancy, when Miss Judson had left them.

"Am I acting strangely?"

"Of course you are. What's the matter?"

"Nothing—more than ordinary."

"But why haven't you been to see me before?"

"Did you want me to come?"

"Of course I wanted you to; in fact, I am really hurt. Just think of it, I hadn't seen you for two years, and although I wrote and told you I was coming, you never even sent me a line. And you waited four days before coming to see me. Have I offended you?"

John went towards the window, from which there was a fine view of the sea coast, but he appeared to see nothing.

"Is anything wrong, John? Tell me."

John shook his head and muttered something about not having time.

"Come now," cried the girl, "you mustn't treat an old friend in this way. If you do I shall be sorry I have

come—and sorry you've come," she added a little mischievously.

"I didn't want to come!" he burst out, and then, noting the pain which shot across the girl's face he burst out: "No, Nancy, forgive me, I didn't mean to say that."

"But, John——"

"I am a mean, selfish hound," cried the young fellow passionately, "and as weak as water. If I weren't I shouldn't have come. What right have I to speak to you?"

"Why, we are old friends!" cried the girl bewildered.

"Yes, I know, and I've tried to think of you in that way; but I can't, Nancy, I can't. That's why I am so mean. Oh, I never meant to speak to you like this, but the sight of you has been too much for me. Do you know why I haven't been before? It was because I was afraid of myself; because I couldn't trust myself. While you were in Leeds and I could talk to you on paper I could control myself, but now——" He had kept his face away from her all the time he had been speaking, but now he turned toward her fiercely. "Look here, Nancy," he cried, "we have known each other practically all our lives—we were children together. Years ago I used to think of you as my sweetheart, and I looked forward to the time when you would become my wife. Of course, I never dared say such a thing to you; but I did. I made all sorts of plans too. I was going to make a fortune and offer it all to you;—but I am one of the world's failures, Nancy."

The girl did not speak a word, but there was a look of wild wonder in her eyes.

"Don't look at me like that," he cried; "I didn't mean to hurt your feelings; I'd do anything rather than hurt you. But there, I'm a coward and a fool. I'll go away before I talk any more foolishness."

But he did not go, instead he gazed at her with adoration in his eyes.

"I controlled myself when I saw you last," he went on;

"I could see you were over-wrought at the loss of your father, and at the thought of leaving home. I made myself believe that I could be your friend without being anything else, but after you'd gone—Oh, Nancy, forgive me!"

Still the girl did not speak. This was altogether different from the lovemaking of Ben Briggs or Young Jack, and it affected her strangely. In the past she had thought that John Trefry was fond of her, and on the day she had left Cornwall she had a feeling that John's interest in her was beyond the ordinary; but she had given it no serious attention. If she had thought of it at all, she had imagined that it was only a passing fancy to cease after she had gone. Now, however, she knew differently.

"Do you know what I made up my mind I would do when you left, Nancy?" he went on. "Of course I knew you were breaking your heart at the thought of leaving Trevanion Court; I knew what you suffered when you had to sell it. It was as dear to you as your eyesight, and the thought of it going to a man like Jack Beel was like pulling out your heart. That was why you arranged for that option. I could see what it meant, and I saw too how impossible it was. How could you raise ten thousand pounds when the old place had to be sold in order to pay—what was owing?"

"I remember," broke in Nancy, "and you offered to lend me all your savings, didn't you? Oh, it was kind of you!"

"That was nothing," and John spoke impatiently, "I would have been only too glad if you had taken it. But there was something else. I had a mad idea that in five years I could somehow get that ten thousand pounds, and I dreamed of the time when, having got it, I could give it you. But I am a failure, Nancy, a failure. That's why I am so ashamed of myself. Why, I worship the very ground that you walk on, and yet I can't do anything for you. I'm not worth ten thousand pence, much less ten thousand pounds. And I shall never be worth it!"

Nancy's eyes became humid, the earnestness and sincerity of the young fellow's words, to say nothing of the devotion which they implied, appealed to her as nothing had ever appealed to her before.

"I never meant to tell you all this," he went on; "it seems so mean, so cowardly, to talk of one's failures, but I did try, Nancy, I did try. Directly you'd gone I started to write a book on electricity. It seemed the only thing I knew about, and I thought such a book was wanted. I had all sorts of wild hopes that it might be used as a text-book in schools and colleges, and thus fetch me a lot of money, but—but it's barely paid expenses."

"You've written a book!" cried Nancy, "and it's published? Why didn't you send me a copy?"

"Oh, I would have sent you a copy had it proved a success; but it's been a failure. I was bitterly disappointed; all my hopes came tumbling to the ground like a castle of cards. Not that I mean to give up," he added, "I've a big book on the stocks. It's a wonderful thing, Nancy, electricity, and as yet we've only touched the fringe of it. Why, it's fine, Nancy. The very air we breathe is charged with it, and when it can become more and more our servant, everything will be revolutionized. But I don't expect I shall ever be able to get it published; it'll be such a big thing, and will cost such a lot."

"Oh, I'm glad!" cried the girl.

"Why are you glad?"

"Because, because—oh, I don't know. But it is fine."

"I oughtn't to have told you all this," went on the youth.

"Of course you ought to have told me, and I'm glad you have."

"It's only another record of failure, Nancy," cried John, "and I would give my heart's blood to tell of success. Oh, I wish I hadn't come; then you would never have known how weak I am. But now I am here I can't help myself. I love you so, oh I do love you so! Good night."

He took his cap as he spoke and moved to the door.

"But you mustn't go yet, John. There are a hundred things I want to talk with you about."

"What is the use, when——? But you are not offended with me, Nancy, are you?"

Nancy's heart was throbbing violently. John's words had touched chords in her heart into life which had hitherto been lying dormant. His declaration of love was a revelation to her, and the mystery of it, the wonder of it, thrilled her whole being.

"I wish I could help you," she whispered.

"You *have* helped me," he cried; "you have been the inspiration of everything. But for you I should never have dreamed of writing a book, and even although it's been a failure I am glad I've written it. It's going to come true too," he added with flashing eyes. "I have gone further than any of the electricians have gone, and I can see how my prophecies may come to pass. Why, electricity is light; it's power; it's *life*! We've only learnt the ABC of it yet. It will be put to untold uses, it will make the world new. Fifty years ago it was scarcely dreamt of—and we are only at the beginning of it even yet! "That's why I did what I did;—and you inspired me, Nancy, *you*! And I'm going further yet. Not that my new book is going to make money, or be a success in that way. I shall never be anything but a poor man. That's why— Oh, Nancy, forgive me for talking like this."

"But you must send me a copy of your book," cried the girl. "You will, won't you?—No, you will bring it, that's it; you must bring it. You must come again to-morrow."

"I daren't come again," and his voice was hoarse. "If I did I should lose control over myself entirely; I should plead with you to marry me, even although I could not give you a home or—or—anything. And that would be mean beyond ~~words~~. But, Nancy, if I can help you in any way you'll let me know, won't you? I'd go to the world's end to serve you—— Yes, I'll send the book to-morrow; but I daren't come again."

He left the house as he spoke and rushed down the lane towards the sea. Nancy watched him until he was out of sight, then she went slowly up to her bedroom and locked the door.

For some time her mind was in a mad whirl of excitement. John Trefry's lovemaking had affected her more than she thought possible. Poor, simple, unpractical John! The boy who had always been spoken of as a dreamer, but whose dreams would never come true. And yet what a gentleman he was! How different he was from Ben Briggs or Young Jack. Unpractical though he might be, unsuccessful according to the world's standards as he would always be, he hadn't a vulgar instinct in his soul. . . .

Yes, impossible as everything was, she was glad he had spoken to her; glad, too, that although his book might be a failure she had inspired him. He understood her; understood how dear Trevanion Court was to her too; understood how she longed to possess it. Fancy his trying to earn money that he might give it to her! She could gladly take her old home as a present from him, and not feel that she was demeaning herself by doing it; rather it would seem natural, and she would be proud of the gift.

For a long time she sat thinking and wondering. Of course she was sorry for John, and yet somehow in a way she could not explain, she was glad he loved her, hopeless as his love might be.

When Miss Judson came back Nancy was very quiet and subdued.

"Has yon lad gone?" asked the older woman.

"Yes, he went a long time ago."

"How long did he stay after I'd gone?"

"Perhaps half an hour."

"You say he works at some electrical place?"

"Yes."

"Has he a good position?"

"I think he gets about three pounds a week."

"Ah. He'll never set the Thames on fire; he'll always be poor."

"He's very clever," Nancy informed her. "He's written a book on electricity. He's going to send me a copy of it."

"I've never heard of it. Has it been successful?"

"I'm afraid not."

"Ah!" The woman was silent for a few seconds and then continued: "It's a pity. There seems no room in this world for failures."

"But he isn't a failure," Nancy defended him; "he's only what some people call a failure. Surely it's possible to be successful without making money."

"You can never get back your old home without it," Mary Judson reminded her.

During the next two days Nancy waited in the expectation that John Trefry would come to see her again, but she was disappointed. On the morning of the second day, however, the postman brought her a copy of his book. It was only a small affair; just a primer for beginners, and it was Sanskrit to Nancy. She did not know the beginnings of electricity, and sighed as she turned over the pages. She was pleased, however, to see it was in its second edition, and turning to the end of the little volume, she noticed that the publishers had inserted extracts from reviews which had appeared in scientific papers.

"He never told me a word about this?" reflected the girl, "and yet how flattering they are."

They were. More than one eminent scientist gave the writer almost unstinted praise, and spoke of him in glowing terms. Nancy carried the book all the day, and placed it under her pillow when she went to bed.

"Nancy," said Mary Judson on the morning of the third day after John's visit, "do you mean to marry that farmer chap?"

"Why?" asked the girl.

"Because it's not fair for you to keep his dog if you don't. He'll think, and he'll have the right to think, that

you are encouraging him. If you don't mean to have him, you should send his dog back."

"But it's my dog," said the girl.

"Nay, it's not, and you've no right to keep it here day after day like this, if you don't mean to have him."

A look of doubt came into Nancy's eyes, and presently on leaving the house she went out for a walk alone, while John followed at her heels. Almost unconsciously she wended her way towards Trevanion Court, John getting more and more restive as they drew nearer the house.

"Do you love me, John old boy?"

John wagged his tail and gave a joyful yelp.

"You want to go back there to live, don't you? It's your home, isn't it?"

John looked at her steadily; he did not know what she meant.

"Is that you, Miss Nancy?"

Young Jack had watched her as she crossed the fields and came close to the avenue.

"Yes, I've brought back your dog," replied the girl.

"But it's *your* dog," Young Jack assured her, "and I want you to keep him."

"But I can't. I have no place in Leeds to keep a dog."

"Then keep him while you're here. You would like to, wouldn't you? Besides, see how fond he is of you."

Nancy patted John on the head, while the dog licked her hand affectionately.

"When you go back to Leeds, if you must go back," went on Young Jack, "you can—— But why must you go back, Miss Nancy? Won't you stay and live in your old home? I know I am not worthy of you; you are a great lady;—you are a Trevanion,—while I'm only Jack Beel; but I fairly worship you. There is *nothing I won't do for you. You're only to breathe the slightest wish and it'll be the greatest joy of my life to do what you want.*"

Young Jack's voice became husky and tremulous.

Each day he had waited and hoped for Nancy's coming. He had felt sure she would bring the dog back, and, as he had told his father, it would give him the opportunity he wanted. Each day, too, he had clad himself in his best attire, so that he might appear attractive in her eyes.

Nancy could not help being impressed by his sincerity, and there, with her old home standing within sight of her, his appeal became doubly strong. It was true he was only Young Jack Beel, son of Old Jack Beel; but he wasn't a bad-looking fellow; indeed, there was something stalwart and manly about him. He had promised to change his name, too. Thus she wouldn't have to be Mrs. Jack Beel, but Mrs. Jack Trevanion. She almost shuddered at the thought of it, but what else could she do? What other means was there by which she could get back her old home—except by marrying Ben Briggs?

"Do," pleaded Young Jack again. "You'd make me the happiest man in the world, Miss Nancy, and I'd give my life to make you happy."

He looked almost handsome as he spoke, and there was such devotion in his eyes that she couldn't help being affected. Her heart beat violently. Why could she not do what he asked?

There before her, not a quarter of a mile away the old home of her childhood lay nestling among the trees. She saw the gardens in which she had romped as a child, caught glimpses of the old granite lichen-covered walls. It was her home; the home she had promised her dying father to get back; and every instinct of her life pleaded with her to possess it again.

"Listen, Miss Nancy," went on Young Jack. "My father has been awfully good to me; he's given me a lot of loose money to play with, and if you'll marry me we'll do up the ~~old~~ house, and buy new furniture. I don't know the kind of thing that's wanted; but you do. You know what would suit each room, and how it ought to be decorated. Why, we could go to London together;

go to the shops where they have the proper things and —and— Won't you, Miss Nancy?"

Again he appealed to her wisely. Nancy was one of those women who loved old furniture, and who took a delight in schemes of decoration. She had a fine colour sense and a quick intuition for the fitness of things. She felt how delightful it would be to have unlimited money, and then visit old furniture shops and buy the things which the old house cried out for.

Well, why shouldn't she? She had lived during the last two years in a modern, up-to-date city where old families and old names were regarded lightly. Of course the dreams of a lifetime would have to be sacrificed and her pride would have to go by the board; but wasn't life as a whole a compromise? Whatever one got one had to pay for, and even although she gave herself to this young farmer she would by so doing keep her promise to her father, and again possess what was dearest to her on earth.

"Only say the word, Nancy," pleaded Young Jack, for the first time forgetting to use the prefix. "Only say the word and promise to be my wife."

CHAPTER XXI

HOW NANCY'S EYES WERE OPENED

THE fatal word was on her lips. Under the spell of the moment she was ready to promise what the young farmer asked. Then suddenly she remembered John Trefry's lovemaking. She saw his face, as she had seen it in Dorcas Uren's cottage; called to mind every word he had said. Poor, unpractical, unsuccessful John, who rushed away from her because he dared not ask her what his heart was prompting him to ask, and yet whose every instinct was refined, and who was a gentleman to his finger-tips. Poor John, he would never be successful; and he would always remain poor.

"Come now," pleaded Young Jack, "promise me, Nancy."

Emboldened by her silence, he moved closer to her side, and placed his hand upon her shoulder.

The day was bright and warm and she wore a summer dress cut low at the neck.

"Give me a kiss, and let's settle it here and now," he pleaded as he tried to draw her nearer to him.

Like one stung she started violently and leapt from his side. The touch of the man's hand upon her bare flesh caused such a revulsion in her heart that she felt like screaming aloud, and in a moment she realized what marrying him would mean. This coarse fellow would possess her body and soul; he would have a *right* to her! Great God! she knew what it meant now; knew that she loathed the very thought of marrying this man. Yes, and she knew something else. Like a flash of light it came to her that John Trefry, poor as he might be, un-

practical as he was, hopeless as his future would undoubtedly be, was the only man to whom she could give herself as a wife. That was why Jack Beel's touch was contamination, and his very nearness to her an insult.

"How dare you?" she cried, her voice trembling with passion.

"Why, why, Nancy——"

"Leave me," she commanded. "By what right do you call me by my name? How dare you touch me? you—you!"

She spoke as the Trevanions of old might have spoken to a saucy servant. Her every look, her every gesture, her every tone suggested that his very nearness was loathsome to her. Young Jack felt all this; saw how she regarded him; knew that to her he was something to be despised.

"Come now," he shouted, "none of that. I didn't mean anything wrong, and in any case you led me on."

"Led you on? I—I—led you on! You!"

"Yes, me," cried Young Jack, who was now wellnigh overcome with anger, and who, as a consequence, lost control over himself. "Do you think I don't know what you came here for this morning? Oh yes, I know I've been a fool; but you aren't going to get rid of me like that, young woman."

"Leave me," cried the girl; "go away from me before I make you."

"Make me?" laughed the young fellow, stung to madness, not only by her words but by the tones in which she uttered them. "I'd like to see you try. I'm on my own land, miss; the land you couldn't keep for all your dirty pride. Do you know what you're doing? You're trespassing; and now you're here I'm master of you, mind that!"

"Go away," cried the girl, "and don't pollute the air any longer by your presence."

"Pollute the air, eh! My Gosh, we'll see about that! I spoke to you fair, I did, and I meant what I said; but

after this I'm damned if I'll stand it any longer.—Oh yes, I mean it! You're Nancy Trevanion, and I'm Jack Beel; but I'm as good as you; yes, and a damned sight better. You think you can tread upon me as though I were a worm; but we'll soon put that right."

He had the look of a devil in his eyes, and his real nature revealed itself. After all, Young Jack was the true son of his father. The thin veneer of a cheap education was pierced in a moment, and the real man was made manifest. Nancy, watching him, felt the truth as she had never felt it before, and she shuddered at the thought of what she had been delivered from. This man, who had so desired her, would have in reality dragged her in the mire; he would have used her as a beautiful plaything until he had become accustomed to his possession; and then——

The touch of the fellow's coarse fingers on her bare neck had told her everything. It had shown her what her real feelings were, showed her that unless she could give her heart to the man she married, marriage would be worse than a mockery; it would be sacrilege, blasphemy. As for marrying Jack Beel, she would rather die than he should come near her!

Without another word she turned on her heel to walk away, but Young Jack, maddened by the insults she had heaped upon him, was not to be beaten.

"No, my beauty," he shouted aloud, "you're on my land and you've got to do what I want. The kiss you wouldn't give me I'm going to take, mind that."

Again he put his arm around her neck and tried to draw her to him, while the girl frantically struggled to push him from her.

"No, no, I've got you!" cried Young Jack brutally. "Now we'll see whose the better, a Trevanion or a Beel; now we'll see the worth of your dirty pride. I'm going to have——"

He did not finish the sentence save to give vent to a fearful yell.

"Get off, you devil!" he shouted, for John, the Airedale,

who during the whole interview had been watching his mistress, had set his fangs in Young Jack's arm, and was growling madly.

Instinctively the young farmer loosed his hold on the girl, who rushed away like a frightened deer, while the dog kept his fangs fixed in the farmer's arm.

Nancy heard him shouting and swearing as she sped across the fields, and realized more than ever from what she had escaped. The man was a brute, a devil, and but for the love which her dog bore her, she would have been powerless in his hands.

Presently she stopped, panting, almost breathless. She had reached the high road now, and knew she was safe; but she felt fouled, contaminated, degraded by what had passed. She, Nancy Trevanion, had almost been on the point of giving this man her promise to be his wife, she had contemplated selling herself to this brutal beast in order to regain possession of an old house and a few paltry acres of land! She shuddered at the thought of it; every fibre of her being revolted.

She heard the rushing patter of feet, a quick panting, and a second later John came to her side.

"My beauty!" cried the girl convulsively, while the dog, as if realizing the inwardness of what had passed, placed his paws upon her shoulders with a joyful yelp. "My beauty! You knew who your mistress was, didn't you? You knew who you belonged to?"

She wound her arms round the dog's neck and kissed him, while he whined for very joy.

"Thank you, my old friend!" she said again and again. "I shall never forget what you've done for me."

Suddenly she remembered that John was not her dog at all; that he had turned against his rightful owner in defending her; but she only laughed at the thought. She would find out the price he had paid for the dog and send him the money; then she would take him back to Leeds.

When she reached Dorcas Uren's cottage she found

that Mary Judson had gone out for a lonely walk. She was glad of this; glad to be alone. She wanted to think of all that had taken place, wanted to examine her mind, her heart. She was excited, bewildered; she wanted to know where she stood. She felt like one who had for a long time been living in the dark, and whose eyes were suddenly opened. Throwing herself into an arm-chair, she called to mind all that had taken place. It was only a vulgar episode, but it had altered everything. She was no longer the Nancy Trevanion of two hours before; she was different. She had a new outlook, new hopes, new desires. Hitherto her paramount thought had been to get back her old home, and she had been willing to pay almost any price to possess it. Now Trevanion Court had a secondary place in her life. She realized that she loved a man who was unpractical, unsuccessful; a failure! He had confessed that he was a failure; frankly admitted to her that he neither hoped nor expected to gain any prize in the race of life; and yet she knew that if she ever married anyone it must be this man—dreamy, unpractical John Trefry.

What did that mean? It meant first and foremost that Trevanion Court was lost to her for ever; that her promise to her father was only empty words. She felt sure that at that very moment Jack Beel would be nursing schemes of vengeance. She remembered the look of a devil in his eyes, saw the man as he really was. She knew that he hated her now; hated her as much as he thought he had loved her; the man's brutal instincts had revealed themselves by his every word, his every look, his every gesture.

Well, she was glad that it was so, glad that she knew the truth.

"Ay, I do feel better," exclaimed Mary Judson when she returned an hour later. "This sea air is like life to me."

"Where have you been?" asked the girl.

"Right along the cliffs. It's been a hard climb, but I

haven't felt tired at all. I feel as though I could go on and on, and never feel tired again."

"You are looking ever so much better."

"Ay, I am better. I've only been here a week, but I'm a new woman. I want to go home, Nancy."

"What, and when it's doing you so much good?"

"That's the reason. I'm so much better that I want to get back to work."

"You're not going back before your month is up," declared the girl.

"Ay, but I believe I could *do* it now," exclaimed the woman; "my mind is clear, and I'm sure I shall be able to see things in a different light. Where have you been?"

Nancy made no reply.

"I expect I can guess. You've been to see yon old place. Well, I don't wonder at you. Have you seen that young farmer again? Ay, I see you have. Has he been making love to you?"

"Don't let's talk of it; it's too horrible to think about."

"Why, I thought as how——"

"I'd rather die!" cried the girl, shuddering, "better never—but there, don't let's talk any more about it."

"Something has happened," reflected Mary Judson as she looked at her friend. "What is it, I wonder? Anyhow, she's in no humour to be talked to."

Day after day Nancy waited, hoping, and yet almost fearing that John Trefry would come again, for she knew what another visit from him would mean. She was sure that when he came he would not be able to help telling her what he had told her before, and she knew the answer she would give him. She knew what it would mean, too. It would mean that all her old hopes and dreams would come to nothing, that she would choose the man she loved rather than the home of her fathers; and although she would have no hesitation in making the choice, it would be at the sacrifice of a sacred promise. For, during the days that followed her encounter with

Jack Beel, she realized that, in spite of her love for John Trefry, her old desires were not dead. Trevanion Court was as dear to her as ever; the promise she had made to her father was as binding as ever. Thus, a great fight was taking place in Nancy's heart; a fight between her love for a man and her hopes of possessing her old home again. She knew that she could not have both; how could she? At best marrying John Trefry meant marrying poverty. He was just an unsuccessful electrician; a man who had never put his knowledge to practical use. Had some men possessed half his knowledge, they might have become famous, perhaps wealthy; but John Trefry never would, thus the dream of her life would remain unfulfilled.

All the same, she meant to marry him—if he would ask her. But would he? She knew his high sense of honour, knew that he would never ask her to be his wife until he could keep her in affluence.

A week passed by and still he did not come. She knew the reason, yet she felt hurt. Why was the man she loved so different from other men?

"Nancy," said Mary Judson as she came in from a walk one evening, "have you quarrelled with young Trefry?"

"Quarrelled? Why should I quarrel? What makes you ask that?"

"I saw him half an hour since," Mary informed her.

"You saw John Trefry! Where?"

"On the cliffs yonder. He stood there alone, and he was looking this way as though his eyes were glued on the place. I thought he looked pale and ill."

"Did you speak to him?"

"Ay, I did. I went up to him and I said, 'Mr. Trefry, why haven't you been over to see us?'"

"What did he say?"

"First of all he started as though he'd seen a boggart; then he recognized me, but he didn't speak a word. So I said to him, 'Nancy is hurt that you haven't come, she's been hoping and expecting to see you every day.'"

"I never told you I had," cried Nancy.

"Ay, but I knew," replied the woman; "I'm not blind. Besides, I was once in love myself. Anyhow, I spoke to him again. I said, 'Nancy wants you; why don't you come?'"

"But you shouldn't have said such a thing! I'm angry with you—— What did he say?"

"He looked at me and said, 'I daren't, I daren't, Miss Judson, I simply daren't.' Then he walked away without speaking another word."

Nancy went to the window and looked towards the sea, but she saw nothing. The waters were a dream of beauty, especially near the coast where they reflected the shades of the many-coloured cliffs; but the sea might have been as uninteresting as the grey waters of Blackpool or Brighton. Mary Judson watched her and saw her lips quivering.

"That lad's rare and fond of you, Nancy," she said.

Whether Nancy heard her I do not know, but a little later she went to her writing-desk and wrote the following words:

"Why haven't you been to see me, John? I'm lonely."

"NANCY."

For three days Nancy watched and waited for John's coming; but he did not appear. At first she was certain he would rush to her side, and she listened eagerly to every passing footstep; then she grew a little anxious. "Something must have happened," she reflected; "John can't be well."

Presently she learnt that he was going about his work as usual, and then she grew a little angry. She felt sure of his reasons for not coming, but told herself that nothing should keep him from her side after she had written. She blamed herself for her impatience, too, and wondered what John would think of her. Anyhow, he could have written.

But he neither wrote nor came, and when another week had gone she was hardly able to control herself.

During that week she never went near Trevanion Court, she felt afraid. She felt sure that Young Jack would be brooding over some schemes of vengeance and that once he had her in his power again he would show no mercy. She had found out that at the sale he had bought John for ten shillings, so she had placed a pound note in an envelope and sent it to him with the words "In payment for John." But she had received no reply.

Altogether this part of Nancy's holiday was not happy, and so pale did she become that Mary Judson looked at her with anxious eyes.

"Our month is nearly up, Nancy lass," Mary said to her one morning. "To-day is Monday and on Thursday we must go back. I've written to Sarah Ellen and told her to get the house ready."

Nancy made no reply, but going to the window she looked for a long time across the grey sea. The sky that day was dark and cloudy, and the sea which reflected it looked gloomy and forbidding. It reflected her own feelings too, for Nancy had become utterly hopeless.

"Where's John?" she asked Mary Judson later in the day, for the dog was nowhere visible.

"I don't know," replied the woman. "He went out just after breakfast for his usual morning's walk, and I haven't seen him since."

"He never stays away," protested the girl.

"No. He follows you like a shadow," replied Mary. "I wonder where he's got to?"

When evening had come and still John had failed to appear Nancy grew anxious. She knew the dog would never leave her of his own accord and was sure that something must have happened to him. She remembered that Young Jack had sent no acknowledgment of the pound she had forwarded, nor had in any way let her know he had received it. Had he done something to the dog—shot him perhaps? But she could not believe it. Whatever schemes of vengeance he might harbour, and

however much he might hate him for defending Nancy, it would not be like him to shoot a dog. Whatever he was, he was passionately devoted to animals, and was known to be kind to them. But he might have stolen it. He would regard this as a way whereby he could "pay her out." Besides, might not Young Jack have some sinister schemes? He would know how anxious she would be at the dog's absence, and that she would use every endeavour to find him; perhaps he would think she would go to Trevanion Court where he could waylay her, and——

Nancy went to bed that night with a sad heart. In spite of her every inquiry no news of John was forthcoming, and she felt sad. For more than three weeks he had slept on the mat outside her bedroom door and she missed him sadly. On the Tuesday she set all sorts of inquiries on foot, but no answers were forthcoming. She felt sure of what it meant. Young Jack had, out of spite, stolen her dog from her.

Her visit to Cornwall, from which she had hoped so much, looked as though it would end in blank disappointment. It was true Mary Judson looked quite well and strong again, but none of her own hopes were realized; in fact, their fulfilment seemed further away than ever.

On coming down on Wednesday morning she saw two letters addressed to her. One was from Mr. Shawcross expressing the hope that she felt all the better for her holiday and telling her that they were eagerly expecting her back towards the end of the week. "A good many orders are coming in," he informed her, "and your work is becoming more and more appreciated."

This was pleasant news, but it brought her little satisfaction. It reminded her that her stay in Cornwall was nearly at an end, and that she must soon go back to the murky streets of Leeds again.

The other letter contained only one line which ran as follows:

"If you want your dog, fetch him."

"Jack Bull."

Nancy felt angry as she read the words, for she felt powerless. She dared not go to Trévanion Court, and the thought of leaving John behind was not only hard to bear, but a confession that she had been beaten. What could she do?

Throughout the day she schemed and planned, hoping to think of some means whereby her desires could be accomplished—in vain. Young Jack was master of the situation. On the following morning she would have to catch an early train for Leeds, and thus would have no time to outwit the young farmer. Towards evening, however, a plan came to her, and no sooner had it been born in her brain than she started to carry it out. It was to go to John Trefry and ask him to obtain her dog, and send him to Leeds to her. At the back of her mind, too, was something else. This plan would enable her to talk with John Trefry again, and perhaps——

She started off, her heart almost light with anticipation. She knew that John lodged at a little cottage nearly a mile away from where the electrical works were situated; knew too that he generally got home from work soon after five o'clock.

But she was doomed to disappointment. When she arrived at the cottage she was informed by the woman who looked after him that he had not returned, neither did she know when he would be back.

"Did he tell you he was going to be late?" asked Nancy.

"He told me not to get 'is tea ready 'till 'ee arrived as 'ee might be late," said the woman. "'Ee's very irregular in 'is 'abits, miss, and I can't count 'pon 'n 'toal."

"And he didn't say where he was going?"

"No, 'ee dedn't say nothin'."

So Nancy's four-mile journey was in vain, and when she set her face towards Mrs. Uren's cottage again it was with a heavy heart.

Her road was over a lonely moor which presently led to a deep wooded valley. The country-side was almost

uninhabited, for the mine which a few years before had flourished on the moor had been worked out ; "skat" in the vernacular of the Cornish people. Here and there on the hillsides around, farm-houses were scattered, but nothing more. When she reached the valley the thick woods made the road dark, and the gurgling stream at the bottom gave the place a sense of loneliness. Barely had Nancy reached the bottom of the hill when she saw a man leap from the hedge into the road ; a man whom she recognized as Jack Beel.

CHAPTER XXII

MARY JUDSON'S WILL

JACK gave an unpleasant laugh as she came up.
"Good evening, Nancy," he said familiarly. "I've been hoping and planning for something like this for days."

The girl stood still for a few seconds and looked at him steadily; then, without a word, tried to pass him.

"No, you don't, my beauty," laughed Jack; "it's my turn now, and you don't get the better of me twice." He stood in the middle of the road, as if forbidding her to pass.

The girl did not speak, although she realized her situation. She saw the ugly leer in his eyes; noted the tones of his voice, and felt sure of what was in his mind. But although fear was gnawing at her heart she showed no sign of it.

"I am not one who forgets," went on Young Jack. "I've made a fool of myself, and I know it. For years I've fair worshipped the ground you've walked on, and I've told you so. Why," and as if carried away by memories of the past he went on passionately, "I was ready to die for you; I'd have been willing to lie down in the road and be a mat for you to wipe your feet on. There's nothing I wouldn't have done for you, you know that."

"Please stand aside," cried Nancy, "and let me pass."

"No, I'm not going to do any such thing. For years I've wanted you to be my sweetheart, and now you're going to be my sweetheart. Do you understand? Yes, you may be a Trevanion, but I'm not the kind of fellow who can be spoken to as if I were a dog. Why, you talked to me as though I were the very scum of the earth. I was willing to give you everything I had—but now——"

Nancy realized that she was in the man's power ; saw by the ugly look in his eyes that all that was evil in him was aroused. Not a soul was near, and the dark silence of the woods added to the loneliness.

"I've been watching you for days," went on Young Jack, "dogging your every footstep ; you haven't known it ; but I have. That day you treated me like scum, and I vowed I'd pay you out. I'm going to too. I may be hanged for it, but I don't care. No, you may look around for help, but there's none near. And John isn't near to fight for you either ; I took care of that."

"Haven't you any sense of manhood at all ? " cried the girl, and there was both anger and fear in her voice.

"Not a bit," cried Young Jack. "You killed all that when you spoke to me as if I were a mangy mongrel dog," and he laughed again ; laughed while his eyes gloated over her. "I asked for a kiss then, didn't I ? Well, we'll begin with a kiss now ; yes, a dozen of them," and he took a step nearer to her with hands outstretched.

The girl did not lose her presence of mind, although she knew her danger. Every fibre of her being revolted against the man's presence, but she mastered her fear, and would not admit the danger which she knew was near. The old pride of race and birth surged up in her being. How dare this fellow, this Jack Beel, stop her in the road !

"Will you please stand aside ? " she said quietly, looking at him straight in the eyes.

Why it was he did not know, but he felt like obeying her. While she spoke angrily and while he thought he saw fear in her eyes, he was master of the situation, but now new forces were at work. They might have been living a hundred years before. She a Trevanion and he a Beel. Instinctively he remembered what the Trevanions had been in Cornwall ; remembered that his father had been a groom at Trevanion Court. But this was only for a moment ; the world had changed, and everything had become topsy-turvy. The Trevanions were no longer what they were, and he, Young Jack Beel, owned Trevanion

Court now! This girl in her haughty arrogance had insulted him and he meant to have his way.

"No, I'll not stand aside," he almost shouted, "and you can't deal with me like that. I'm going to——"

But he did not finish the sentence; there was a rustle of bushes close by, followed by quick footsteps.

"Anything the matter?" said a voice, and, turning, Nancy with a glad heart recognised John Trefry.

John understood the situation in a moment, but he neither blustered nor threatened. John had an innate horror of vulgar brawls, and he knew the kind of man Young Jack Beel was.

"I'm glad I happened to be passing, Miss Trevanion," he said. "Was this fellow's presence offensive to you? Allow me to have the pleasure of seeing you home."

It was an instance of the power of mind over matter, of the superiority of one man over another. Young Jack was mad with rage, mad too at the thought of being thwarted, but he felt himself a beaten man. He knew that, physically, he was far more than a match for John Trefry; but he slunk away like a whipped cur.

"I'll pay her out yet," he muttered as he made his way homeward. "I'll get the better of her although I swing for it, and she shall never have Trevanion Court back," but he felt himself beaten.

As for Nancy, no sooner had the man gone, and she found herself in safety by John Trefry's side, than all her courage evaporated, and she began to sob like a child.

"Why Nancy," cried John in dismay, "what is it?"

"I was afraid," she said, "and—and—— Oh, John, why haven't you come?"

"I longed to," he replied; "every bit of me was aching to come; but I daren't."

"I was wanting you, John—wanting you; and so—as you didn't come to me—I went to you."

John heard the tremor in her voice, felt the abandonment in her words, and all his resolutions seemed as nothing.

"I have to go away to-morrow morning, John," she

went on. "I have to get back to Leeds. There is a young man there who wants to marry me; he's very rich, and has offered to give me Trevanion Court as a wedding present. What must I do?"

Never had John Trefry fought such a battle as he fought that evening in the dark lonely valley. Every fibre of his being was crying out for Nancy, and reason almost went by the board. Even honour seemed to have no meaning. What, after all, was honour, and was not love a thousand times more? He had a right to fight for his own hand, a right to happiness—and surely Nancy cared for him or she wouldn't have spoken like this.

But he did not speak a word. There was a quiet strength in his heart which kept him speechless. He was sure that Nancy would never be happy unless she won her old home back, and he was unable to help her. Besides, he had no right to ask a woman to love him. He was one of the world's failures and he felt that it would be next door to a crime to take unto himself a wife whom he could not afford to keep.

Thus it was, when they parted an hour later, that the words Nancy wanted to hear again were unspoken, thus too she started for Leeds next day with an aching heart.

But Mary Judson was in high spirits. Her month in Cornwall had done marvels for her. All her old weakness and lassitude were gone. She moved and spoke with vigour, and had all sorts of hopes for the future.

"Ay, Nancy lass," she cried as the train swept up the valley between Lostwithiel and Bodmin Road, "I feel as though I could do anything, and I'm fair longing to get back to Laburnum Cottage."

Nancy could not help smiling at her friend's eagerness.

"Ay, I know what you are thinking about," said Mary, noting her look; "you are wondering what there is in Laburnum Cottage to go back to, but I tell you, lass, Leeds is the grandest place in the world to me. Cornwall is all right for a holiday and it has done me no end of good."

but Leeds is home. Besides, I am full of ideas, and before six months are over I'll have done it."

"Done what?" asked Nancy.

"Why, have made rubber. Then all you hope for shall come to pass."

Nancy was silent. In spite of her friend's enthusiasm, she had little or no faith in her success. How could she? Nothing new had happened, and there was no more chance of her succeeding now than there had been during the long years before.

"Oh, I know what you're thinking," went on the woman, "but I mean to do it, and I must do it! I promised my father I would, and I will. I tell you, my dear, as I've seen how you've felt about getting back your old home, I've felt more than ever it's a kind of call to me. Your father left you a legacy, and my father left me a legacy. That's why we've been brought together. When I fulfil my purpose you'll have fulfilled yours."

The woman's enthusiasm affected Nancy in spite of herself, and when they got back to Leeds, and Mary Judson started to work with new energy she felt that perhaps she was right. She determined too that she would give all the help she could. Thus it was that night after night after she had returned from her designing rooms at the mill, she found her way to Mary's laboratory and worked with her. She found a lot of her old text-books too, together with her professor's lectures and more than once during the coming months it seemed to her that success was in sight.

But in all this she was sadly handicapped. Never once would Mary Judson allow her to see her father's formula. Indeed, this was almost a religion with the woman, and although she saw that Nancy was pained by her persistent refusal, she held to her resolve.

"Ay, lass," she said again and again, "I know I seem to be defeating my own ends, but I can't help myself. Father made me promise that while I lived no one should ever see that formula, and I daren't go back on my word."

It would seem as though I was breaking faith with the best man that ever lived."

Although Nancy assented to this, she did so with a sad heart. She believed that if she could study old Amos Judson's formula item by item, she might be able to fasten upon the one thing lacking.

For there still remained this one thing lacking. Again and again they produced rubber; sometimes it seemed almost perfect, and they were in high hopes; then at the next experiment when the pan was unscrewed, they discovered nothing but a heap of useless rubbish. In vain they cudgelled their brains, in vain they discussed what seemed to them every possible alternative, but beyond this point they could not get. They had made rubber; they knew they had. More than once they had made it to perfection, at least it seemed so; but they were never masters of the situation. They were never certain that when the next batch was produced it would be as good as the last.

The summer passed away and another dreary winter came to an end, and still the position had not altered, or if it had altered, it had altered for the worse. For Nancy could not help admitting, even when she wanted to be most hopeful, that her friend's improvement in health was only temporary. While summer remained, she appeared to retain the vigour which came to her in Cornwall; but as the winter days came on, and they lived amidst the almost perpetual gloom of Leeds, she saw that Mary became more weak and languid. The colour went out of her cheeks and she dragged her limbs along as if with difficulty.

"No, no, lass," Mary said at every suggestion of Nancy that they should have another holiday, "I daren't. I must stick to my work. If I go out of Leeds before I have made this stuff, I shall never come back again."

As they neared the third anniversary day of Nancy's coming to Leeds and the weather became bright and warm again, she thought she saw some improvement. But in

reality there was no improvement. The woman was breaking her heart because her desires were unfulfilled.

"It isn't only of myself I am thinking," she said one day after one of their many disappointments; "it isn't only that I promised my father. I am thinking of you, lass."

"You mustn't trouble about me, Mary."

"But I can't help it. Three years out of the five are gone, and I'm not a bit further on than I was on the day you came. That's what's killing me."

"Killing you?" replied Nancy. "Don't talk nonsense. You are going to live to a good old age."

"I feel I should if I were successful, but persistent failure takes all the go out of me."

During this time Nancy had been hard at work at Shawcross's Mill, and her employers were more than satisfied with the progress they had made. In two years they had built up quite a good connection, not only in the North of England, and in provincial towns, but also in London. More and more the heads of furniture houses called for Nancy's work, and although Shawcross & Greenwood had not made a fortune, they had become noted as being the producers of the most tasteful and artistic cretonnes and chintzes on the market. Indeed, Nancy found herself in receipt of quite a comfortable income. According to the agreement she had signed at the outset of her engagement, her payment largely depended on the success of her employers. And they were successful; not in any extraordinary degree, but sufficient to justify them in paying her what was considered a good salary.

"It was a lucky day for both of us when you and I met," Mr. Shawcross assured her one day. "We've done well, and you haven't done so badly."

"No," replied the girl, "I have not done badly."

"Not badly! Why, you get more than any designer in Leeds. Mind, I don't begrudge it you; but you'll get seven hundred pounds this year, and that's not to be sniffed at."

And he was right. Seven hundred pounds was a handsome income, especially for a girl; but handsome though it was, it was far less than what she had hoped for. She thought of everything in the light of the option she had demanded on the day of the sale, and knew that she would never be able to buy back Trevanion Court by that means. Three years out of the five had now gone, and while she was spoken of as one of the most successful women in Leeds, her heart was heavy.

Then on the anniversary of the day of her coming to Mary Judson something dreadful happened. On the day before, Nancy had been congratulating Mary on her improved appearance. The long winter was now over; and, as we have said, with the coming of summer Mary's health had improved. Indeed, she had felt so much better that she began to speak quite hopefully of the future.

"In a few weeks," said Nancy, "we will go down to Cornwall again, and then you will be quite set up."

"I'd love to," replied the woman. "Ay, but I'll never go until I've done what I promised father."

"Lass," she confided to her before going to bed, "I feel as how by to-morrow this time, I shall have discovered the thing that we've been after so long."

"Why? Have you thought of anything?"

"No, it's only a feeling; and yet it's more than a feeling; it's a conviction. I know in my heart of hearts that the truth's coming to me to-morrow. It will be grand, won't it?"

Nancy looked at her friend curiously; there was a strange look in her eyes as though something out of the ordinary had happened.

"I am glad," the woman whispered, "for it'll mean you having your heart's desire. I think that's what I've longed for more than anything else."

"It will be grand if it comes to pass."

"Ay, and it will. Give me another kiss, lass."

Nancy gave the woman another kiss, and then turned to leave her, but Mary held her fast.

"You have meant such a lot to me, Nancy," she said to her lovingly. "Since you came life has been different. I was a sour, crabbed old maid before then. I just lived for one thing. I used to dream of a night what I should do when I had unlimited brass. Not that I wanted to be a rich woman," she explained; "all the same, I wanted brass, and I used to gloat over the thought of having it. I loved nothing except my father's memory, and I just lived to make people admit that he was the greatest man in Leeds. I was getting to be an old woman before my time, and a sour old woman at that; then you came and your bonny face made me young again. Ay, lass, I *do* love you."

"And I love you, Mary."

"Dost a'?" and she lapsed for a moment into the Yorkshire dialect, "dost a'? Weel, I'm glad on it. Good night, my dear. To-morrow I'm going to know the thing we've wanted to know, and then you'll be happy."

"She seems strange," thought Nancy as she went to bed. "I wonder what she has in her mind?"

Being tired, however, she went to sleep quickly, and did not wake till she heard a frantic knocking at the door.

"Miss Trevanion! Miss Trevanion! come; come quick!"

"Has anything happened?" asked the girl, scarcely awake.

"Ay, summat terrible! Come quick!"

She rushed to the door and opened it to find Sarah Ellen standing before her with blanched face and terror-stricken eyes.

"What's the matter?"

"It's Miss Judson," gasped the woman.

"What of her? is she ill?"

"She's dead," was the reply.

It was some time before Nancy could speak; the news had come to her so suddenly and so unexpectedly that she was almost bereft of her senses. A few hours before she had parted with the woman at her bedroom door, and

had congratulated her on her improved appearance ; now, suddenly and without warning had come this, dreadful news.

"Dead!" she cried. "It can't be."

"Ay; but it is. I knocked three times, and then, on getting no answer, I went into her room. She must have died in her sleep; in fact, I thought first of all that she *wur* asleep. But she wur'n't. Won't you come and look at her?" she added.

"I daren't!" cried the girl, and she stood holding the door in her hand like one paralysed.

"What must I do?" asked Sarah Ellen.

"Run for the nearest doctor—perhaps—perhaps—— Don't wait, go at once."

"That'll be no good," said the woman, almost sullenly. "She's had the doctor in several times lately; Doctor Shaw of Park Road."

"But she never told me."

"Nay, I know. She said I wasn't to say a word to you because you'd be anxious. I believe she knew what *wur* coming."

"Anyhow, send for him right away. No, telephone. I'll be with you immediately."

Nancy dressed like one in a dream. Even yet she could not realise the truth of what the woman had said. She recalled what had taken place on the previous night; remembered Mary Judson's words: "To-morrow I'm going to know the thing we've wanted to know." Had she any premonition of what was coming?

She heard Sarah Ellen at the telephone, knew that she was informing the doctor of what had taken place, then, scarcely realising what she was doing, she made her way to her friend's bedroom.

Yes, Sarah Ellen was right; she looked like one asleep. There was a calm placidity on her face which suggested sleep, but the girl knew she would never wake again. The marble-like rigidity of her features, the awful pallor, could have only one meaning. There was a smile on her lips;

a smile which suggested recognition, but beyond that the features were expressionless.

Nancy looked like one fascinated. What had Mary been thinking of in the hour of death? she wondered. What did that smile of recognition mean? Had she seen her father, and had old Amos Judson welcomed her to a land where there was no sickness?

She called to mind Sarah Ellen's words. Unknown to her, Doctor Shaw had visited her more than once, and it was at her own request that Sarah Ellen had not informed her. Was she cognisant of some secret disease which she would not make known to her friend?

She called to mind that she was more than ordinarily affectionate when they parted the night before. Usually a self-contained emotionless woman, she had been almost demonstrative.

"Kiss me again, Nancy lass," she had said, and then had embraced her almost convulsively.

This must have some meaning.

Nancy found herself sobbing bitterly. She knew now that she had during the last three years learnt to love Mary Judson and that life would be terrible without her. She remembered that it had been the dearest hope of the woman's life to help her to get back her old home, remembered too with joy that Mary had told her that she had brightened the last three years of her life.

The mystery, the wonder of death moved her. A few hours before this woman was breathing, sentient, planning, hopeful; now she was gone for ever. Nancy felt utterly desolate, utterly hopeless; her friend had gone.

Afterwards, she knew not how long, the doctor came into the room and found her kneeling by the woman's bedside.

"Come, come," the doctor said, "you must not give way like this."

"Will there have to be an inquest?"

Why she asked the question she did not know; the thought came to her suddenly.

"No," the doctor replied. "I've been expecting this

for weeks. Indeed, it's a marvel to me that she has lived so long. I should have warned you, but she forbade me; she said you would be troubled, anxious, and she wanted to save you from anything like worry. You were a great joy to Miss Judson, Miss Trevanion; no one knows what you have meant to her during these last three years. Without you they would have been sad beyond words. You have made them bright."

"What was the matter with her?" Nancy asked almost mechanically.

"A diseased heart," replied the doctor bluntly. "As I said just now, it is a great wonder to me that she has lived so long. But she seldom talked about her pain or her illness, she was always quiet and self-contained; but I knew that her love for you was wonderful."

Of what happened during the next three days Nancy knew little or nothing. She realized vaguely that John Shawcross had sent her word that she was not to come to the mill—conscious also that many strange people came to the house, but she paid but little heed to them. She felt alone in the world; alone and utterly helpless. Then came the day of the funeral when Nancy bade good-bye to all that remained of her friend. She made no plans for the future; she had no heart to do so, although in a vague kind of way she reflected that she must get a new home. Jessie Briggs had written telling her that she must come to Woodroyd and stay at least a month, but Nancy, while appreciating her friend's kindness, did not accept the invitation.

Yorkshire fashion, there was quite a gathering of friends at the house after the funeral. John Shawcross was there, so were some distant relatives of Mary Judson, together with the doctor, and the lawyer who had managed Mary's affairs.

Sarah Ellen had prepared quite a banquet for the occasion.

"Miss Mary always liked things done right," she reflected, "so I'm going to make a nice funeral of it. I would be

ashamed to meet 'er in 'eaven if anything looked common or stingy on the day she wur buried."

After partaking of a hearty meal, the visitors, or as they called themselves, "the mourners" gathered in "The Room," and seemed in a state of expectancy; while Joshua Blackburn, the lawyer, took a legal-looking document from a case he carried with him.

"This is Miss Judson's will," he said in a matter-of-fact tone. "I made it for her less than three weeks ago."

There were significant nods at this, and the relatives whispered to each other that doubtless Mary "knew it was coming."

"It's only a short will," went on the lawyer. "She wouldn't allow me to put it into legal phraseology and I put down her wishes exactly as she dictated them."

"I, Mary Judson, being in my right mind, make the following disposition of whatever I may leave behind me. I give to Sarah Ellen Dixon the sum of twenty pounds, together with the brooch which she so coveted as a keepsake. She may think herself lucky to get so much. Everything else I possess, of whatsoever nature, I give to my dear friend Miss Nancy Trevanion, who has lived with me during the last three years, and I hope with all my heart that she'll be successful in finding out what together we have so long been searching after. I shall help her all I can. The formula which she so longed to see is in the safe beside my bed, and it is now hers to make whatever use she can of it. The key of the safe is in my cash box. She knows where it is. The house, Laburnum Cottage, in Rhododendron Street, and all that is in it I leave entirely to her without any qualification, and I hope she will live here until she can go to the house which she has in her heart to buy back. The laboratory and all its contents I also leave to her, together with all the little money I have been able to save during the last two years, with the exception of the twenty pounds I leave for Sarah Ellen."

There was a long silence after the lawyer ceased reading

and it might be that the look on some of the relatives' faces spoke of disappointment.

"That's a funny will," remarked one.

"Ay, it is," said another. "I wonder whether it would stand in a court of law?"

"There is no doubt about that," replied Joshua Blackburn. "It's as legal as the law can make it. As for the wording of it, although it's not usual, it was as she desired, it was taken down as nearly as possible as she uttered it. It was read over to her in my presence and then a draft of it was made. It was finally signed and witnessed in proper order."

"Ay well, then there is nothing to say," remarked one of the relatives. "Mary was always a queer one, so was her father, old Amos, afore her."

"How much money did she leave?" asked another.

"I've inquired into that," replied the lawyer, "and as near as I can make it out, she left, after all her debts were paid, just over two hundred pounds."

"Ay, I thought she would have left a bit more than that," remarked one.

"She was as poor as Job's turkey when old Amos died," someone else responded.

"You'll 'ave expected something like this, I fancy, Miss Trevanion," remarked an old Yorkshireman, Joshua Leadbeater, who was second cousin to Amos Judson.

"I never dreamt of it! I never thought anything about it," replied Nancy, who had been listening in silence during the whole of the proceedings.

"Ay, well, she hasn't cut up very well, hasn't Mary; but it's better than nothing. This house will be worth six or seven hundred pounds, and that with the bit of brass she left behind her will be handy. I think you've done very well, Miss Trevanion," and with a significant nod the old man made his way out of the room.

A few minutes later Nancy was left alone in the house with the exception of Sarah Ellen, who was busy in the kitchen.

"I never dreamed I should miss her so much," thought the girl; "never dreamed that she had become so dear to me."

Almost mechanically she began reading the draft of the will which the lawyer had left with her. Presently she came to the words, "The formula which she so longed to see is in the safe beside my bed and is now hers to make what use she can of it. The key is in my cash box. She knows where it is."

Without waiting another second Nancy rushed upstairs and found the cash box of which Mary had spoken. Yes, that was the key, and almost feverishly she opened the safe.

She looked into every drawer, every compartment, but the formula was not there.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE LOST FORMULA

REFLECTING that in her excitement she had perhaps searched carelessly, she went through every part of the safe again. Old letters, old documents, were all eagerly examined, but nothing like the formula was forthcoming. What did it mean? A thousand wild thoughts surged through her mind; surely there could be no mistake about it? Again and again Mary had referred to it, again and again Nancy had asked for permission to see it.

She recalled the night when she had first entered the laboratory, and Mary had told her of the great dream of her life. She had mentioned this formula then, and had held a copy of it in her hand. But she would not allow her to see it. Why? She remembered that her friend frequently repeated that her father had made her promise never to show it to anyone during her lifetime, unless she had succeeded in making rubber. She had also told her that she kept it in the safe which stood by her bed. She remembered, too, that Mary had been very particular about taking it to the Bank before going to Cornwall the previous year, and immediately took it out on her return; at least, she said she did.

But it was nowhere to be seen!

A fearful doubt came into her mind. Had there ever been a formula? Was not this formula a mere phantom of the mind, something which had never existed, but which she had spoken of so often that she had become convinced of its existence? She had heard of such things, and in the bewildered state of her mind she wondered.

Again she went through the safe. She examined every scrap of paper; every suggestion of a scrap of paper. She was careful to see that there were no secret compartments in any of the drawers. But there were no results; she could find nothing.

And yet there must be a formula. Mary Judson was incapable of intentional deceit, and she was not given to flights of imagination. One of the most plain, straightforward, matter-of-fact women in Yorkshire, she was to be absolutely trusted; yet in this case she found nothing but mockery.

She made her way to the room beneath and gave herself up to reflection. In spite of herself, she realized that she had built a great deal upon this supposed discovery; realized that although she had told herself a hundred times that it was impossible to do what the greatest chemists in the world had failed to do, she had all the time believed in ultimate success. And now everything had become impossible.

During the next three days Nancy repeatedly searched the whole house. She examined every nook and every crevice from the cellar to the cock-loft. She also made a thorough examination of every paper in the laboratory; but all her efforts were in vain; nothing was to be found. Did a formula really exist? She almost felt herself obliged to answer in the negative, and yet when she considered the kind of woman Mary was, and reflected on the whole story, she could not believe it. But where was it?

Nancy decided to stay on at Laburnum Cottage. She was sure this was what Mary would desire, and although the thought of living there alone was anything but pleasant, she preferred living in a house of her own to going into lodgings. Besides, she could abundantly afford to do it. Her designs were becoming more and more successful, and John Shawcross was true to his promise both in the letter and in the spirit.

But the dream of her life was as far off from fulfilment as ever. Even if she realized every penny of her possessions

she could command only a little more than a thousand pounds. And what was the use of a thousand pounds when she wanted ten?

Jessie Briggs repeatedly wrote to her asking her to make her home at Woodroyd; but Nancy, although she paid occasional visits to her old school friend, could not be persuaded to fall in with her plans. Truth to tell, Nancy felt less and less pleasure in visiting Woodroyd. Ben Briggs, who evidently made a point of knowing the date of her visits, was always in evidence, and was always seeking means whereby he could be alone with her.

Thus it came about that Nancy spent most of her evenings in solitude and loneliness. It was true that several Yorkshire people, kindhearted and hospitable as they were, often invited her to their homes, but Nancy felt in no mood for their society. She realized that the days were swiftly passing away and that she was getting no nearer to the fulfilment of her heart's desire.

For three months after Mary Judson's death and after she had searched in vain for the formula, she seldom went near the laboratory. It seemed to her like a place of buried hopes. She remembered how her friend had worked there night after night during the past years and yet had never found out what she hoped to discover.

During August she had gone to the Lake District with Jessie Briggs and stayed a fortnight among perhaps the most wonderful scenery in the world. She would have stayed longer, but Jessie having informed her that her brother Ben intended joining them, she returned to Leeds. Nancy was in no mood for Ben's love-making.

On her return from Windermere she found a letter from John Trefry. This letter, according to Nancy's estimate of it, was cold and formal. John had received overtures, so he said, from the manager of an electrical company who proposed starting electrical works in South America, and as he saw no means of anything like advancement in his native county he felt disposed to accept. He gave her no particulars, did not mention the name of the company

nor even the part of the country where he contemplated going. Neither did he ask her to write him. He simply concluded with the words, "By the time this reaches you I shall, in all probability, be on my way to another part of the world."

"And that's that, I suppose," reflected the girl a little bitterly, for John's letter had wounded her pride. She had told him as plainly as she dared when in Cornwall what her feelings towards him were, and John had refused to listen to her.

She felt more than ever alone now. Jessie Briggs was at Windermere, John Trefry had gone to the ends of the earth, while she was left alone in Leeds. There was no one in the house but Sarah Ellen.

For Nancy had still retained the services of this grim Yorkshire woman. Although she was an indifferent cook, and anything but a cheerful companion, she believed her to be dependable and to have her interests at heart.

"Yon Langham chap has called again," Sarah Ellen informed her a few hours after her return. "He thought you might have altered your mind about letting him have the use of your laboratory. I expect he'll be coming to see you."

"He was told plainly that I was not disposed to let him have the laboratory," was Nancy's reply.

"Ay, I know, and he wur right vexed about it," remarked Sarah Ellen.

Whether the news of Langham's visit affected her I do not know, but she suddenly determined that she would do alone what her friend had failed to accomplish. It was true she hadn't the formula, but she had so often worked with Mary Judson that she thought she remembered practically all the ingredients which the woman had used. Perhaps if she begun at the beginning she might——

She made her way to the laboratory and began to work. After that she tried again and again. Night after night, after her work at John Shawcross's mill was over, she found her way to the laboratory, hoping almost against

hope that she would find out the secret which had so persistently hidden itself from her friend.

"Oh, if I could only find that formula!" she said to herself one night after one of her many fruitless experiments.

But she did not possess the formula. In spite of the fact that Mary Judson had mentioned it a hundred times in her hearing, and had specially referred to it in her will, it was nowhere to be seen. . . .

Why had she not thought of it before? For she never had. There was only one alternative to the formula being mere imagination on Mary Judson's part, and that was that some one had stolen it.

At first this thought seemed too absurd to have any meaning, but it haunted her nevertheless. The more she thought of it the more she was certain that Mary Judson had possessed it; therefore——

Who would be likely to have stolen it? Who would have any idea of its existence?

She could not think of anyone but Langham. He had come to her soon after Mary Judson's funeral, again asking for the use of the laboratory. But that would not do. If it had been stolen at all, it must have been stolen between the day before Mary Judson's death and the day of her funeral, and Langham had never been near the house during that time. Who else could have done it? Of course a number of people had been in the dead woman's room during those days, but the safe had been securely locked, and it had been made to defy burglars. It was one of Chubb's patents, and she alone knew where Mary Judson kept the key.

For days Nancy pondered over this new problem. The more she thought the more she became convinced that the formula which Mary Judson had guarded so carefully had been stolen from her. But who could have done it?

She felt that the time of the option was fast coming to an end. Three years and a half were now gone, and only a year and a half remained. She felt like despairing.

One evening, on returning home from John Shawcross's

mill, she felt more than ordinarily depressed. Winter was now coming on and the grey murky atmosphere seemed to wrap her around like a mantle. What was there in life for her to look forward to? She had done her best to fulfil her promise to her father, and had failed. Beyond Jessie Briggs she had no real friend in all that great Metropolis of the North. John Trefry was, she supposed, in South America, but never once had he written telling her of his whereabouts, and she had been too proud to ask any of her Cornish friends whether they knew what had become of him. There was nothing before her but a loveless life amidst the gloom and grime of that great Yorkshire town. It was true she now had a good salary, and was looked upon as a successful woman; but the thought of spending her life, fond as she was of her work, as a designer to a Yorkshire manufacturer was grim and repellent. She was still young; indeed, in spite of the fact that she was nearing twenty-five, she looked only a girl; but she knew that the years were passing away, and that her youth would soon be gone. What had life to offer her?

She was just entering Rhododendron Street when she heard a quick step by her side, and turning she saw Ben Briggs.

"I hoped I might catch you, Miss Nancy," he said. "I knew the time when you generally left Shawcross's, so I arranged to be here."

"I am not so difficult to find, am I?" replied Nancy with a welcoming smile, for at that moment she felt so depressed that Ben Briggs's presence was welcome to her.

"I don't know about that," replied Ben, "at any rate you avoid me as much as possible."

"What right have you to say that?"

"Oh, I am not blind. Why, no sooner did you hear that I was coming to Windermere last August than you packed up your traps and left. You are not vexed with me, are you?"

"Certainly I am not vexed. Why should I be?"

"I am glad of that. I have something to tell you," he

went on after an awkward silence. "Do you mind if I come in and sit down for a few minutes?" For they had now reached Laburnum Cottage.

"Come in by all means," replied Nancy, who was almost glad of Ben's proposal. The thought of sitting alone throughout the whole evening was anything but pleasant.

Ben had become quite an important man in Leeds during the last three years. Not only had he prospered greatly in business, but he was freely spoken of as a future Lord Mayor of the city, and he had been invited to contest a neighbouring constituency at the next election. He had the look of a prosperous man, too. He dressed well, and his constant association with large business transactions gave him an air of authority which Nancy had not recognized at their first meeting.

"This is a cosy, comfortable room," remarked Ben when the girl had switched on the lights. "Do you enjoy living alone?"

"It has its advantages."

"I suppose it has," and Ben spoke thoughtfully. "I nearly bought a house myself some little time ago," he went on. "I should have done so but for mother."

"Why should you want a house?" asked the girl.

"Oh, a fellow wants his privacy," replied Ben, "and it's almost impossible to get that in a house like ours. Still, I have made a sort of compromise with mother. I have had a suite of rooms furnished according to my own taste, and I don't think they're bad. I wish you'd come and see them. I hate all the velvet and gold with which mother has surrounded herself, and I really think I've had my rooms done up nicely. When will you come and see them?"

"Was it to ask me that, that you came to see me?"

"Partly," replied Ben, "but it wasn't the main thing. I have only just returned from Cornwall," he added.

"Cornwall?" repeated the girl, her interest immediately aroused. "Have you been to—to—"

"Yes, I saw Trevanion Court, I paid a special visit there,"

and Ben knew by the eager look in the girl's eyes that she was waiting for him to say more. "I don't wonder at your feelings about it," he went on; "it's the loveliest old place I ever saw. We've grand places in Yorkshire; but nothing like that. Why, it's an idyll, a poem, that's what it is. Nothing I ever saw appealed to me so much."

"Oh, I *am* glad!" cried the girl. "I thought perhaps you might not like it."

"Like it!" cried Ben. "Who could help liking it? Of course it isn't one of those high-ceilinged, plate-glass places so dear to our Yorkshire people; it's just a lovely old home, and it has the stamp of centuries upon it."

"You feel that, do you? I am glad of that."

"How old is it?" asked Ben.

"It was built in Elizabeth's time," replied the girl, "but it's on the site of a much older house. Indeed, I suppose there was a Trevanion Court in the time of Edward the Confessor."

"No wonder it almost broke your heart to sell it," said the young man heartily. "I don't profess to be over sentimental about such things, but it would have broken mine. As for the oak in the rooms, it's just priceless. I was told, when I was there, that one of those American millionaire fellows had been to see it and offered the owner several thousand pounds for the panelling in the dining-hall."

"But he can't sell it!" cried Nancy; "that was especially stipulated at the sale."

"From what I heard old Beel gave the American the option of buying it at the end of a year and a half," remarked Ben, looking at her keenly.

"The old wretch," exclaimed Nancy passionately; "but he shall never do it!"

"I suppose you can't stop him—if you don't take up the option yourself," and Ben still continued to watch Nancy's face.

"No, I suppose not," Nancy had to admit; "but I have a year and a half yet."

"A year and a half is not long; it'll be gone almost before you know where you are. It would be a shame, though! Old places like that are very rare, and for an American to pull down that panelling, and cart it away to some gaudy mansion in New York would be like sacrilege."

"It *would* be sacrilege," cried the girl; "there ought to be a law passed prohibiting such vandalism."

"Still, a man has a right to do what he likes with his own property," urged Ben. "I also heard that old Beel was contemplating cutting down that old avenue of trees leading to the house."

"Cutting down the avenue!" exclaimed the girl. "Why—why——!" words failed her.

"Yes. I suppose that kind of tree is very rare, and that there is a great demand for such timber. Of course, it's only gossip, and there may be no truth in it; but from what I saw of old Beel he's just the man who would do such a thing."

"Did you speak to him?"

"Oh yes, I spoke to them both—father and son. When they knew I was acquainted with you they were mightily interested."

"Did you tell them you knew me?"

"Yes, I said you were a great friend of my sister, and that I often saw you."

"Anything else?" asked the girl eagerly.

"No, I think that was about all," replied Ben, still keenly watching her. "Oh, when I come to think of it I did say something about your hoping to buy it back."

"Did you? What did he say?"

"He laughed," was Ben's reply. "He seemed to look on it as a joke. But I thought the young fellow looked ugly. It does seem a shame though," he continued, like one musing, "that fellows like those Beels should own such a place. It's beautifully situated too. What a wonderful view there is from under that portico, or whatever you call it."

"There is no place like it in the world!" cried Nancy almost rapturously.

Ben had carefully planned this interview. Keen-witted and far-seeing as he was, he had learnt to know the inwardness of Nancy's mind, and he saw the mistakes he had made in the past. He realized that he had neither been wise nor diplomatic in his previous proposals, and that as a consequence he had approached Nancy from a wrong angle. True to his reputation that "Ben Briggs always got what he wanted," he had never given up his determination to marry Nancy, and he had gone to Cornwall partly in order that he might better understand her standpoint. Hitherto he had approached her in a blunt Yorkshire fashion without preparing his way; this time he had acted with a due foresight. He had even calculated as to the best time to approach her. She would, he reflected, be tired and depressed after her day's work, and she would feel lonely in going back to an empty house. He had learnt from Sarah Ellen that Nancy had no engagement for that evening, and that therefore their *tête-à-tête* would be uninterrupted.

"Do you know what I made up my mind to do after my talk with those Beels?" asked Ben.

Nancy shook her head.

"To ask you to give me the right to buy it," and Ben spoke impressively. "I looked up the terms of the option," he went on, "and found that you, and only you, would have the right to buy everything back within five years from the day of the sale, and that meanwhile none of the panelling or any of the wood-work could be touched. But it could be easily arranged. All you would have to do would be to communicate with your lawyer and he would claim the right to buy. Then I would write you a cheque for ten thousand pounds, which you could place to your credit at the Bank. By that means you could easily——"

"But I should have to make it over to you afterwards," cried Nancy.

"Not if you didn't want to. I say, Nancy," and Ben's voice quivered, "my offer still holds good. Nothing would give me greater joy than that you should have your old home as your own. We could spend at least half our time there too. There is something else too, which I want to tell you. It's a secret as yet and I don't want it talked about. One of my reasons for going to Cornwall was to meet the chairman of the committee of the —— Division. I should like to be a Member of Parliament for one of the Cornish constituencies," he added.

"Do you mean to say that they invited you to stand for ——?"

"I have a unanimous invitation to contest the division," replied Ben.

"How lovely! And did you accept?"

"I promised to give them my answer in a few days." Trevanion Court is in the division," he added, "and it would sound well for the Member to live there, wouldn't it?"

Nancy found her heart beating wildly. She had never thought of such a thing; never dreamed of it. Ben's proposal appealed not only to her love for her old home, but to her love for her county. To be the wife of a Member of Parliament for the division in which Trevanion Court stood!—to live there again!—to enter into the life of the people and——!

Every nerve in her body tingled; her pride was flattered, almost every instinct of her nature responded to the picture the proposal called up.

Well, why not? Her heart's desire would be realised then. And there was no other way of realising it. Her thoughts about John Trefry were utterly Utopian; he did not really love her, he could not! He had gone abroad without telling her where he was going, and without giving her a chance of writing him. Besides, even if he did love her, her marrying him would mean giving up all thoughts of her old home. And she could not do that now. Her talk with Ben had made such a thing impossible.

He had made her realise, as she had not realised since she had been in Cornwall, how lovely and desirable it was. Besides, there was her promise to her father.

"I shall have to let Lord —— know in a week," went on Ben, rising as if to go; "and you'll think about it, won't you, Nancy? The years haven't altered my feelings one bit, and——"

"Yes, I'll think about it," she replied. "But please go now. I'm afraid I'm a little upset at the thought of those Beels selling the panelling to that American, and cutting-down that avenue of trees which was planted by ——. Good night—I really want to be alone."

"And may I call again—say in three days' time?" persisted Ben.

"Yes; if you do not hear from me between now and Friday I shall be alone on that evening."

When Ben had gone Nancy gave a deep sigh—whether of relief or not she was not sure. She only knew that she felt afraid, and that if Ben had continued to plead his cause she might be led to make promises of which she would afterwards repent.

"I must think," said the girl to herself when he had gone, "I must think it all out in quietness."

CHAPTER XXIV

'SARAH ELLEN AT BAY

NEVER since her father had died had Nancy been so perplexed as now, and never were Ben Briggs's prospects so bright as at this moment. Pride of race, pride of name, and pride of her old home which had been somewhat cooled by her life in Leeds had burst into a flame again, while her promise to her father was no longer a kind of pious sentiment, but a stern duty. She must, she simply *must*, carry out her plans! She must get back Trevanion Court.

But how?

John Trefry was put in the background of her life. John had disappointed her, he had more than disappointed her, he had wounded her; he had wounded her *amour propre*. In an hour of weakness her heart had gone out to him, and at one time she would have been willing to have sacrificed everything, and lived in poverty for love of him. But John had left her, and she knew not where he was. Besides, John was dreamy, unpractical; one who would always take a back place in the race of life.

Young Jack Beel was no longer to be considered. That scene, within sight of her old home, when he had placed his coarse hand upon her and sought to kiss her, made her shudder. No, no, *that* was impossible!

But Ben Briggs was different. He was at least an educated man, and stood well in one of the foremost cities of the Empire. He was successful; he looked what he was, a strong, capable man; and in some senses he was a gentleman. He loved her too, had loved her for years, and the persistence with which he pleaded his cause

flattered her. Ben had much improved during the three years she had known him ; he no longer appeared so self-aggressive, so confident of his own worth ; he had become more modest, and from her standpoint more attractive. And as his wife, living at Trevanion Court, she would be able to hold her head high in the county. But more than all her dream would be fulfilled. Jack Beel's power would be gone ; his hateful presence would not pollute her dear old home any longer, and she would again become mistress of the place that was dearer to her than any place on earth.

But she was not satisfied. When all was said she did not love Ben. She respected him, she admired him, she even liked him ; but she didn't love him. During the time he was with her she was almost ready to promise him what he asked ; but now that she was alone with her thoughts, and had time to weigh the pros and cons, she felt uncertain, doubtful. Could she bear the thought of spending her life with Ben Briggs, of giving herself to him as his wife ? Which was the better, to live her life alone ; to spend her best years as a designer for Shawcross & Greenwood or some similar firm, and remain in Leeds ; or to marry Ben Briggs and again possess her old home ? For that was the alternative, and the only alternative. . . .

She found herself thinking of Mary Judson, and what for years the woman had striven to do ; but Mary was dead ; she had died without realising her hopes. If she, Nancy Trevanion, could only find that formula there might even yet—

Almost unconsciously she found herself thinking more about Mary Judson than about Ben Briggs's proposal. Snatches of their many conversations came back to her ; memories of their experiments in the laboratory became more and more real. Of course, Mary *must* have had a formula ; how else could she have made rubber ? For she *had* made it ; she had made it again and again before Nancy's own eyes—sometimes almost to perfection. It was true that the success of one day had become the failure of the next ; nevertheless, they had been near to complete

success, and unless that formula had existed, and had been almost perfect, this could not have been done.

And some one had stolen the formula. She was as sure of it as she was sure she was in the room at that moment. Mary Judson would never have deceived her, and would never have given her her precious document knowing all the time that it did not exist.

Who had stolen it?—Who would be *likely* to steal it?

Like lightning her mind fled back to the night of her visit to the laboratory for the first time. She remembered that Mary Judson had told her the whole story of her endeavours to make rubber, and that while listening to her she fancied she had caught the sound of stealthy footsteps. She had also asked Mary who could have been there at such a time. . . .

There was another occasion too on which the same thing had happened. . . . Each time it was approaching midnight when the city was asleep. There was only one person who could have known of their presence there. Who was it?

Sarah Ellen! The answer came like a flash of light.

Why should Sarah Ellen listen at the laboratory door? Why should she seek to know her mistress's secrets?

Again memory began to work. It was on the night that Mr. Shawcross had first made his proposal to her that Mary Judson had first told her of her secret. On that night she had gone to Woodroyd to consult Elijah Briggs. . . . She remembered how strange Ben Briggs had looked, and how he had left the house directly she had gone into his father's study. . . . She remembered other things too. More than once she had seen Ben and Sarah Ellen talking eagerly together. What could there be between them? . . . There was Langham too. . . . Had she not heard that Langham and Ben Briggs had been mixed up in some scientific adventure? Could it be possible . . . ?

Her mind was working at lightning speed, and a thousand things became possible. She remembered the morning of Mary Judson's death. Sarah Ellen was the first to enter

her bedroom, and Sarah Ellen would know that the formula was in the safe beside the bed. She also knew where Mary kept her keys. . . . Could it be possible that . . . ?

Yes, the time fitted in exactly. Mary Judson had told her on the night before she died that the formula was in her safe, and yet when she, Nancy, had opened the safe on the evening of the funeral it had gone. Therefore, it must have been stolen between those dates. Who had entered the death chamber? The undertaker's men? . . . Yes. . . . Also one or two others; but no one who would know anything about the formula, much less steal it.

Thus only Sarah Ellen remained; but—but——

Nancy began to reconstruct the whole situation. She remembered how Ben had told her that he meant to marry her; called to mind the look in his eyes when he had said this. . . . Ben knew how dear was her hope of buying back Trevanion Court; knew too that she could never get ten thousand pounds except through some extraordinary means. *Was he afraid that she would succeed?*

All this flashed through her mind in a few seconds, and as each second passed she became more and more convinced that she had fixed upon the truth. She thought she understood Ben thoroughly. He had a commercial mind and believed that everything could be obtained by money—consequently . . .

"Supper's nearly ready, Miss Nancy," Sarah Ellen informed her as she entered the room and laid the tablecloth. "I shall bring it in in about ten minutes."

Nancy went to her bedroom without a word; at that moment she felt she could not remain in the same room as the woman. She wanted to accuse her of what she had done; wanted to drag the truth from her word by word. But she must be careful, she must say nothing before making certain of her suspicions.

Almost mechanically she washed, and changed her dress. Having done this she made her way downstairs. By this time, although her mind was still in a ferment, she was outwardly cool and collected. She knew the kind of

woman Sarah Ellen was, and felt sure that Ben would have given her full instructions in case of discovery. Besides, if she made known her suspicions to Sarah Ellen the woman would immediately communicate with Ben, and thus prepare him for what she might do. She must be careful.

"You don't look well to-night," Nancy remarked as the woman appeared with her supper.

"Nay, I am nobbut middlin'. It's been very lonely here since Mary Judson died," replied the woman.

"You've got a young man, haven't you?" asked Nancy.

"Ay, I spoase so. But he's noan so young; he's five years owder nor me."

"Have you been engaged long?"

"Ay, a good mony year, but he's noan in a position to marry—at least, not yet," the woman added significantly.

"You see, he's a bit ambitious and wants to start a shop. When we've got enough brass to do that we shall geet wed."

"How much money does it take to start a shop?"

"Ay, two or three hundred pounds; and that's a lot of brass."

"Do I know your young man?"

"'Appen you do. He's called here a few times. Ezra Day is his name."

"Yes, I remember. He works for Mr. Briggs, doesn't he?"

"Ay, he works at one o' Briggs's mills. But Ezra is noan a quick worker; that's why he's never made brass."

"Then as soon as he's saved up the necessary money you'll get wed?"

"I reckon it'll be me as'll have to get the brass," Sarah Ellen replied.

"And how long do you calculate it will take?"

"Maybe sooner than some on 'em think," replied the woman. "I wur never cut out for a servant, and I don't mean to remain one."

"Perhaps you have friends who'll help you?" suggested Nancy.

Sarah Ellen gave Nancy a quick searching glance, but seeing that her face was expressionless replied, "'Appen I 'ave."

Nancy had watched the woman closely during this conversation; noted every intonation of her voice; marked the somewhat furtive looks which the woman had given her.

By the time her meal was over the girl had made up her mind. Whatever was done must be done quickly. Of course, she might be entirely wrong in her suspicions, but she meant to test them at once.

"Sarah Ellen," Nancy said later when she came in answer to her ring, "I want to talk to you a few minutes."

"Ay, what do you want to say?"

"I have discovered something."

• Sarah Ellen was silent.

"I have discovered that some one unlocked Miss Judson's safe on the morning she died and took something from it. Have you any idea who it was?"

Nancy heard the woman give a quick gasp, and then watched her as she swayed to and fro like one who had received a sudden blow. She was quick to notice that Sarah Ellen's face had become as pale as paste, and that a look half of terror shot from her eyes.

"You do not reply," Nancy persisted, "but you know, don't you?"

"I don't know what you're talking about. Me know!"

"But you do."

"I know nowt about it," replied the woman doggedly. "If anybody went to the safe it weren't me."

"I didn't say it was you," replied Nancy. "But there was no one in the house but us, and I've positive proof that some one went to the safe that morning and took something from it."

"Took what?—What have I took?"

"Never mind what; something on which Miss Judson placed great value."

"I'm noan a thief!" cried the woman defiantly. "Why

should I take anything from her safe? Besides, how could I get the key? You don't accuse me, do you?"

Nancy fixed her eyes steadily upon her; the woman's manner more than her words confirmed her in her beliefs.

"It's a very serious thing," went on the girl solemnly, "a very serious thing. To rob a safe while a woman was lying dead in bed near by means a terrible punishment."

"It's a lie! A cruel lie! Why should I rob her safe?" Sarah Ellen's voice was hoarse. "I know nowt about what she kept there. How could I?"

Nancy did not speak at this, but kept looking steadily at her, while the fear in her eyes increased.

"What's the good of a bit of paper to me?" went on Sarah Ellen frantically. "I know nowt about chemistry. Do you mean to say——"

The woman stopped suddenly; she realised that she had tacitly confessed her guilt.

"What piece of paper?" asked Nancy.

"How do I know what piece of paper? It's all a mak' up."

"The piece of paper you mentioned."

"I never said nowt about no piece of paper. I only guessed that you'd lost summat and was trying to find it."

"How did you know I'd lost something?"

"I know nowt about it, besides, if I had that paper where is it?"

"You gave it to Mr. Ben Briggs," replied Nancy.

"Remember he was here to-night."

"But—but he didn't—tell you!" She almost gasped the words. "Why, he promised——"

"What did he promise?"

Sarah Ellen realized that she'd been making admissions; saw that she had told Nancy what she had determined to deny. "You're trying to get me, a poor ignorant woman, into trouble," she said doggedly, "that's what you're trying to do, and it's mean. I know nowt about the safe; I never went near the safe; I know nowt about what was in it; and I never took anything."

"“Do you persist in saying that ? ”

“ Ay, I do. Why, Miss Judson was a friend to me ; she left me twenty pound and a brooch. Not but what she oughtn't to have left me more,” she added, “ but do you think I'm made of stone ? Do you think I could go into a dead woman's bedroom and steal anything out of her safe ? . . . No, you may ask me what you like, but I'm not going to say another word.” •

“ You persist in that ? ”

“ Ay I do. I'm noan a thief nor a liar, and as sure as I'm alive I'll make you pay for what you've said to me to-night. You accuse me, an honest woman, of being a——”

“ What have I accused you of ? ”

“ I'm noan going to say any more, except that I give you a week's notice. There now,” and Sarah Ellen slammed the door behind her as she left the room.

Nancy did not wait a second, but going to the telephone she rang up Woodroyd.

“ Is Mr. Ben home ? ” she asked.

“ He's just finishing dinner,” was the reply, “ but I fancy he's going out right away. Do you want to speak to him ? ”

“ Yes. Will you ask him to come to the 'phone ? ”

“ Who is it ? ” Nancy heard Ben say a minute later.

“ What do you want ? ”

“ Is that you, Mr. Ben ? It's Nancy Trevanion.”

“ Nancy Trevanion ! ” and she noted the change in his voice. “ Yes, Miss Nancy, anything I can do for you ? ”

“ Will you be engaged to-night ? ”

“ Not if I can be of service to you,” replied Ben in honeyed tones.

“ I should like a further talk about what you were saying to-night ; and I should like to see your bachelor apartments. You know you promised me,” laughed the girl.

“ Do you mean to say you'll come up here to-night ! ” exclaimed Ben excitedly. “ Why, of course I'll wait for you.”

"In about half an hour," Nancy confirmed; then she hung up the receiver.

After that she rung up a garage and ordered a taxi to be at the door immediately. She was about to leave the room, when she thought she heard something outside. Could it be that Sarah Ellen had listened while she was speaking? She hesitated a second and then rang up the exchange again.

"Is the supervisor there?" she asked.

"No, she went some hours ago."

"But you have some one in authority there?"

"I don't know, I'll see. Hold the line a minute, please."

Placing the receiver on the shelf Nancy rushed to the door and was just in time to see Sarah Ellen creeping down the passage. The woman evidently hearing a noise went to the kitchen and slammed the door behind her.

"Are you there?" asked Nancy as she returned to the phone.

"Yes, what is it?"

"It's now just after eight," said Nancy; "will you please cut off my connection till midnight."

"I don't understand."

"I am going out," Nancy went on, "and shall not probably be back till midnight. I don't want this instrument used while I am away. Do you understand? I don't want *anyone* to use it. Have I made myself plain?"

"I think so. You want to be cut off till midnight."

"That's it. I can depend on that, can't I?"

"Yes, certainly."

A little later Nancy was dressed awaiting the arrival of the taxi. As may be imagined she was greatly wrought upon; it seemed to her that the world had changed during the last half hour, and that upon the next two hours the future of her whole life might depend. An unpleasant interview lay before her too. It was not a light thing to accuse a man of being a party to such a plot as she was sure had been concocted by Ben Briggs. Thus,

although apparently cool and collected, every nerve in her body was quivering with excitement.

"There is a taxi at the door," announced Sarah Ellen.

"Thank you, Sarah Ellen," replied Nancy quietly, then leaving the house she closed the door with a slam and went towards the front gate. A second later she returned and by the aid of her latch-key she again noiselessly entered. Silently making her way towards the room where the telephone was placed, she saw the woman vainly trying to use the instrument. Nancy laughed as she left the house the second time.

Ben Briggs was eagerly awaiting her when she arrived at Woodroyd. Himself opening the door in answer to her ring, he met her with a glad laugh.

"You don't know how pleased I am," he exclaimed. "Jessie has gone out to-night, and father and mother are entertaining two of the dullest people I know of. Your coming is just a godsend. Is anything the matter?" he added.

"What should be the matter?" asked the girl. "Your description of your bachelor rooms appealed to me and I wanted to see them. I am sorry if my coming is inopportune."

"Inopportune!" cried Ben. "You can't imagine how pleased I am. I was just going down to the club when you rang up; but all the clubs in the world are as nothing compared with you. Will you come this way?"

Nancy hesitated. Now that she had reached Woodroyd her task seemed harder than ever. Ben seemed so glad to see her, and his manner was so frank, and so little suggestive of mystery that her suspicions seemed the veriest nonsense. How could this prosperous self-satisfied young man be guilty of what she had in her mind? The very ardour of his looks too made her feel uncomfortable, indeed, for a moment she was slightly afraid. Then she heard Elijah Briggs's voice in the adjoining room and the thought of the honest Yorkshireman's nearness gave her confidence.

Ben led the way to the sanctum on which he had evidently spent much thought and care.

" 'Tisn't so bad, is it ? " he questioned Nancy, on her entry. " I've had everything fitted up according to my own taste and it's the quietest part of the house. These are my books. Won't you come and look at them ? "

Nancy gave a quick glance round the apartment, saw the comfortable easy chairs, the heavy mahogany writing-desk, and the rather flamboyant pictures which hung on the walls ; then she noticed the heavy safe in one of the corners.

" No, I won't look at the books just now," she replied. " I didn't come for that."

Ben noted the change in her voice ; there was something challenging in it ; something unpleasant.

" Is anything the matter ? " he asked, looking at her closely. " Has something happened ? "

" Yes, I want you to tell me something."

" Want me to tell you something ? " repeated Ben. " What ? "

" I want you to tell me what you've done with the formula that Sarah Ellen Dixon took from Miss Judson's safe and gave you ? " the girl said.

CHAPTER XXV

BEN BRIGGS'S CONFESSION

FOR some seconds Ben Briggs did not speak ; he stood in the centre of the room looking at Nancy in open-eyed astonishment. Ben was not good at dissimulation, indeed in some senses he was a very truthful man. As a boy he had often brazened out things, and had sometimes seemed to take a pleasure in his misdeeds, but he had never tried to deceive. There was nothing of the Uriah Heep about him ; he never professed humility, and seldom owned himself in the wrong. But he was not a fool, and he made it a point of understanding a position before implicating himself in any way.

Nancy's accusation had staggered him, and for a time he was too bewildered to think of anything which would be equal to the occasion.

"Will you tell me what you mean by that?" He no longer spoke in honeyed tones, rather there was defiance in his voice.

"You know my meaning," replied Nancy.

Ben had mastered himself by this time and was able to think clearly.

"You didn't want to see these rooms at all," he said ; "you have come here under false pretences."

"If you like. I had no interest in seeing your rooms ; but I've found out something since you left me ; found that you used my servant as a kind of tool, that you bribed her to steal a valuable document from Miss Judson's safe. I accused Sarah Ellen of it less than an hour ago," she added.

Ben did not reply for some time ; he was evidently trying to sum up the situation. Presently he burst out laughing.

"Ay, you've found out that, have you?"

"Yes, I've found out that."

"Well, what then?"

"I've come for it; that's all. Because you have it; you can't deny it."

Ben laughed again, laughed with easy assurance.

"Of course I'm not going to deny it," he said. "What you say is quite true, but whether I'm going to return the paper is another matter."

"Oh, yes, you will."

"Will I? We shall see. Whose going to make me?"

"I shall."

"How are you going to do it?"

For a moment Nancy was staggered. She realized that she no longer had Sarah Ellen to deal with, neither was she in her own house. She was alone in the room of Ben Briggs, and in spite of her accusation he seemed master of the situation.

"Then am I to understand that you are a receiver of stolen goods? That you, Mr. Ben Briggs, who boast of your honour and your integrity, would do a thing like that?" There was a taunt in her every word.

She had adopted the best possible method. If she had threatened him, he, with his bull-dog nature, would have remained defiant; but he was proud of his good name and rejoiced in the reputation of being a "straight man." Thus it was that her taunt wounded him, and he started like a man who had received a knife thrust.

"What's that?" he asked.

"You've received stolen goods," repeated the girl; "you've bribed a poor ignorant servant girl to do a mean thing—you, Ben Briggs, who hope to be the Mayor of Leeds. It would sound well if it were known, wouldn't it?"

"And who's going to make it known?"

"I will."

Ben began to pace the room and to consider the position more carefully. Not that he intended to throw up the sponge, and admit himself beaten; that was not his

nature. Besides, he had many weapons in his armoury, and he was not easily defeated.

Presently he stopped and looked at Nancy ardently, admiringly, longingly. Three hours before he had believed that he had won her. Never had the girl seemed so complaisant before, never had she spoken so kindly. Now he felt himself in danger of losing her. He was angry that his plot had been discovered and that the girl by her keen wit had frustrated him, but he was no whit ashamed or conscience smitten.

"Yes," he said defiantly, "I admit that I got Sarah Ellen to steal that piece of paper. It's there," and he pointed to the safe. "Do you know why I did it?"

The girl was silent.

"I did it because I wanted you, and because I was afraid of losing you. Yes, I'll be frank about it. I never wanted anything in my life as I want you, and I determined to get you. Steal that piece of paper! Call it that if you like; but I don't call it stealing. What is it worth? It may not be worth a brass farthing, or it may be worth a thousand pounds. But what of that? I'm ready to give you ten times that. Look here, Nancy," and he took a step nearer to her, "let's get down to the bedrock of things. Three years ago last summer you came to this house to pay Jessie a visit, and I fell in love with you. I had never loved a girl before. Of course, I fancied I had been in love a score of times, but the moment I saw you I *knew* I hadn't; you were the one girl I wanted. I tell you so straight; I've told you so before, and I offered you everything I had if you'd marry me. But you wouldn't."

The earnest, sincere tones of the man affected Nancy in spite of herself. Looking at him as he stood before her she could no longer think of him as a thief, or as one who had been a party to a mean action. After all, there was truth in the old adage, "All's fair in love and war," and in spite of herself she could not help being flattered by his evident devotion. In a way too she almost admired him. There was something so strong in his well-set-up figure.

his square shoulders, his determined jaw, and the steely light in his bright eyes.

"You know what followed," went on Ben. "You wouldn't have anything to say to me; you would hardly listen to me. But I was never one to give up. As you may have heard there is a saying here in Leeds that 'Ben Briggs always gets what he wants.' And I mean to get you. . . . I wasn't long in finding out the secret desire of your heart. You, with your family pride, wanted to buy back your old home. So I offered to buy it, offered to give it you as a wedding present. Well, you wouldn't have anything to say to me. Then I found out that Mary Judson had a scheme for making synthetic rubber; that her father, who had spent years on it, left valuable papers and that she had hopes of doing what her father had failed to do. I didn't believe much in it, but I knew that if she were successful there was pots of brass in it. I found out, too, that Mary had got to be fond of you, and that you had gone into a kind of partnership with her. Never mind how I found out; I did; and I was told that if Mary was successful you would have the ten thousand pounds necessary for what you wanted. Is that right?"

Nancy did not reply, but she listened attentively to every word that fell from the man's lips.

"I don't deny it," went on Ben; "I was afraid. I knew how clever you are, and Jessie had told me about the way you distinguished yourself in chemistry when you were at Cambridge. So I determined, if possible, to forestall you; but I never could, you were too clever."

"The man Langham . . ." cried Nancy.

Ben laughed again. "Yes, the man Langham," he admitted. "But it was no use, he couldn't do it. If he'd done it I should have spiked your guns, and made a good deal of money for myself. But mind, I did it all because I wanted *you*; please remember that."

Nancy did not speak, she was reading Ben's mind, following the course of his purposes.

"Mary Judson's failures began to set my mind at rest,"

went on Ben, "but after you had been to Cornwall together you started again with renewed hopes. You see, I knew all about it. But still you failed to find out. . . . I found out that you had asked Mary again and again to let you have the formula which her father left her, but she would never let you see it. You know the reason why. Mind you, I didn't really believe that if you got hold of it you would ever make rubber; all the same, I was determined that you should never have it. I knew your cleverness, knew how determined you were to get that brass. That was why I made my plans, that's why I got hold of the document which is in that safe at this moment. *But I did it all out of love for you, Nancy.* You see, I meant to pay back a thousand times all I took from you. You believe that, don't you?"

"Whether I believe it or not," replied Nancy, "I want it back. I've come for it."

"But it can't be of any use to you!" protested Ben. "Think of all the years old Amos Judson worked at it; think of all the years his daughter worked at it—all in vain. Do you think you will succeed where they have failed?"

"Then give it back to me," persisted the girl.

"I am afraid; that's the fact," stammered Ben. "You—*might* succeed!"

For a few seconds there was a silence between them. In spite of Ben's confession, Nancy did not at the moment see her way to force him to give her the paper from which she hoped so much, while Ben, watching her eagerly, thought he saw in her face something that gave him hope.

"Give it up, Nancy!" he pleaded. "Everything you hoped for you shall have. Just promise to marry me and I'll do anything you want, *anything*!"

Nancy shook her head.

"I've come for that document, Mr. Ben," she replied, "and I'm not going to leave this room until I have it."

"Why, think," he went on "and be sensible. Suppose I give you this paper; suppose after many more trials you made rubber—what could you do with it? It's now

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"I've come for that document, Mr. Ben," she replied, "and I'm not going to leave this room until I have it."

"Why, think," he went on "and be sensible. Suppose I give you this paper; suppose after many more trials you made rubber—what could you do with it? It's now

November, and say you made it by next spring ; what then ? What good would it be to you ? You want ten thousand pounds hard cash, and I tell you it's not easy to get ten thousand pounds. How are you going to get your invention on the market ? Before you can do that you would have to promote a company who would buy your invention. Even if you were successful it would take you years to do it. And by that time your option would have expired. Don't you see ? The thing is hopeless whichever way you look at it."

"Then give me the paper," retorted the girl ; "in any case it's mine, and you've no right to keep it from me."

Ben took a step towards the safe as if he were about to comply with her request ; then fear came into his heart again. Might she not do it ? The girl with her keen, eager brain, and with the knowledge she already possessed, *might* be successful ! . . . And then . . .

The ground seemed slipping from under his feet. He, Ben Briggs, was in danger of being beaten. He stopped suddenly and turned upon Nancy angrily.

"No, I'm damned if I will !" he shouted.

"You refuse to give it to me ?"

"I do." Then he began to move towards the girl.

Fear came into Nancy's heart. There was a look in his eyes which she had never seen before ; a look which reminded her of what she had seen in Jack Beel's eyes. At that moment Ben Briggs seemed capable of anything.

"Stop !" cried the girl, and almost involuntarily the man obeyed her. "If you take a step nearer me, I press this bell push, and to-morrow all this city shall know what you've done. It shall be in every newspaper that Ben Briggs—who has been spoken of as the future Lord Mayor of Leeds ; who has been invited to stand as a Member of Parliament, and who boasts of his integrity, and *honour* !—employed a servant girl to rob a dead woman's safe—that he is no better than a common thief. I give you a minute to obey me. If in that time you do not place the paper in my hand, I'll do what I say."

"And if I give it you?" asked Ben quickly.

"No one shall know anything about it," was the girl's reply.

He waited a few seconds as if hesitating, then with a laugh he went towards the safe and unlocked it.

"Have your own way," he said, coming towards her. "Here it is." But before he had reached her side Nancy pressed the bell push.

It was an instinct which caused the girl to do this; an instinct which every woman possesses in moments of danger.

Ben knew what she had done, and why she had done it, and he knew the victory was hers.

"Would you ask Mrs. Briggs whether she can see Miss Trevanion, for a few minutes?" she asked the servant who answered her ring. "I've finished my business with Mr. Ben now and should like to see Mrs. Briggs before I go."

"I'm sure Mrs. Briggs will want to see you, Miss Nancy," said the servant, who had been in the house for years.

"Then I'll come with you. Thank you, Mr. Ben; I'll take it now."

Ben noted her look as she almost snatched the piece of paper. Nancy had been too clever for him.

She saw in a second that she had obtained what she came for; saw that the document was in Amos Judson's writing, and knew that whatever might be the result of her night's work, she possessed what Mary Judson had so long kept from her.

"Shall we say good night now," said Nancy sweetly, "or will you come with me to your father and mother?"

Ben did not reply, save to go back to the safe and lock it.

Nancy did not stay long at Woodroyd, although Elijah and Mrs. Briggs pleaded hard with her.

The taxi was waiting for her, she explained, and she wanted to get back to Laburnum Cottage at once.

"Ay, Nancy lass," said Mrs. Briggs, as she accompanied

her to the door, "I wish you could see your way to make it up with our Ben. He's been rare and miserable lately, and I know he's all the time thinking about you. You've been to see him, haven't you?"

"Yes, I called about a matter of business," said Nancy.

"He's told me all about it."

"What, about my business to-night?"

"Nay, I know nowt about that; but about the way he's tried to persuade you to wed him. I wish you could; he's a grand lad is our Ben, and he's rare 'n fond of you. Think it over, lass. Promise you will, won't you?"

"Yes, I'll think it over," replied Nancy.

"And come again soon. I'm sorry Jessie isn't home to-night, but she's gone to the theatre with her young man. I expect it'll be settled soon," she added significantly. "She's told you all about it, I suppose."

"No, I haven't heard a word. Is Jessie——?"

"Ay, he's been after her for years, has Walter Lister. He's a good chance too. I'll let you know as soon as it's settled up, and if you *could* see your way to wed our Ben I should be the happiest woman in Leeds."

On reaching Laburnum Cottage Nancy eagerly turned to the formula she had obtained and feverishly read it. Yes, there were things mentioned of which she had known nothing, and which Mary had never told her. The omission of these things might account for her failure, since Mary Judson's death. She was more hopeful than she had ever been.

"I'm going to bed now," said Sarah Ellen, appearing at the door. "Is there anything more I can do for you before I go?"

"Nothing more, thank you. Good night, Sarah Ellen; I hope you'll sleep well."

But the woman did not move; she seemed to be struggling to speak further and could not.

"You've seen Ben Briggs?" she blurted out presently.

"Yes," replied Nancy.

"What did he tell you?"

"Everything."

"Then you know all about it?"

"Yes, I know all."

"What are you going to do with me?"

Nancy looked at the woman for a few seconds before replying; saw the look of terror in her eyes; saw her abject misery.

"I am going to do nothing," she replied.

"Nothing! Do you mean to say——?"

"I mean to say that I'm going to take no notice of your week's notice, Sarah Ellen; and I hope you will stay with me as long as I remain in Leeds."

"Do you mean it?"

"Of course I mean it. Good night, Sarah Ellen."

"Nay, nay, but I mun tell you everything! I didn't mean to harm you, Miss Nancy; I didn't for sure; and Ben Briggs told me that nowt but good would come to you through it—and I've waited so long for Ezra. Ben promised me that I should have all the money that was needed to start the new shop on the day you wedded him—and Ezra 'll never do owt for himself. He's a sawny, a great sawny is Ezra. Ay, I *do* love him though! and I would do *anything* to get wed. That's why——"

"Yes, I understand," broke in Nancy, "so we'll say no more about it."

"And you'll never tell anybody?"

"Never a word."

"And Ben won't; I know that."

"No, he'll not say anything."

"Ay, Miss Nancy," and the woman sobbed outright, "I'll do anything for you, I'll work my fingers to skin and bone for you, I'll—I'll——"

"There, there," cried Nancy, patting her on the shoulder, "I know you will. We're good friends now, and I'm sure you'll never try to deceive me again."

"Deceive you! I'd die first. Good night, Miss Nancy, and may the Lord gi' you your heart's desire."

CHAPTER XXVI

FAILURE !

DURING the next few weeks Nancy spent most of her spare time in the laboratory. The possession of old Amos Judson's formula had not only given her new hopes, but new knowledge, and she worked feverishly to turn this knowledge to good account.

As may be imagined, it was an anxious time. Not only was she fearful lest nothing should come of her endeavours ; she was in constant terror lest even if she should succeed, Ben Briggs should thwart her purposes. She had no one to whom to turn for help and advice, and she was continually haunted by the fear that some one would forestall her. What use, she asked herself, had Ben made of the document during the time he possessed it ? Did he make copies of it ? Might there not be, even at that moment, able and experienced chemists making use of old Amos's findings ?

This did not hinder her from pursuing her investigations, however. Night after night she was in the laboratory, studying, testing, experimenting.

Towards the end of February she was sure she had made progress. She had overcome Mary Judson's chief difficulty ; she had been able to obtain uniformity in her results. As the reader will remember, Mary had never been certain of this. As the woman had repeatedly said to her, the success of one day had been the failure of the next. One day when the pan was unscrewed she took out what seemed to her rubber ; then the next day, although there had been no alteration of ingredients or of conditions of manufacture, it came out, to use Mary's own word, " mush."

But she had overcome that, and had now arrived at the stage at which she was certain of the results.

But she was not satisfied.

Again and again she compared the synthetic rubber with that which she had bought in the open market, and while to the uninitiated they appeared identical, there was to her a difference. What that difference was she was unable to put into words; but it was there. Please remember that Nancy was only a clever amateur, and that while she had been noted at Cambridge as an eager student, she had little experimental knowledge. Moreover she was terribly afraid; and while she longed to take some clever chemist into her confidence she dared not do so. She imagined all kinds of dangers; she told herself that there might be many in Leeds, who, although she had not breathed a word of her plans, were waiting to rob her of all she was working for.

It was true Ben Briggs made no sign, neither did there seem ground for her suspicions. Nevertheless, the suspicions were there. She obtained new locks for the laboratory door, and used every precaution she could think of to avert danger. Each night before going to bed, and each day before going to John Shawcross's Mills, she locked and double locked everything which seemed of importance. She also warned Sarah Ellen, who by this time had become her faithful ally and devoted slave, against allowing anyone, however unsuspicious or harmless, to go near the laboratory.

"Ay, Miss Nancy lass, if I could only help you!" Sarah Ellen, who watched her with anxious eyes, said again and again. "What is it, lass? Do tell me. It may be that, ignorant as I am, I can be of some use."

But Nancy did not accede to Sarah Ellen's wishes. She knew that the poor creature could not help her, and that whatever was done she must do alone.

As we have said, however, by the end of February she was in great hopes that she had succeeded. Experiment after experiment was successful; time after time

she carefully weighed the ingredients and placed them in the pan and time after time the results were the same. She had made rubber; she had made it repeatedly, and there were no variations in the quality.

"I shall do it!" she exulted. "I have overcome Mary's difficulty, and I shall be able to buy back my old home with what I have won myself!"

Yes, everything seemed right. She could produce synthetic rubber at less than a quarter of the price for which it could be bought; she could manufacture it in any quantity, and there were no limits to the supply of ingredients needed.

Her work now was to place her discovery before the world. But how? Here her inexperience and ignorance of the industrial world rose up before her like a mighty mountain. Even although she had made the greatest discovery of the age it seemed useless to her.—There was no man in the wide world whom she could trust. Yes, there was one—Elijah Briggs. Keen business man as he was; eager as he was to increase his already huge fortune, she was as sure he was as honest as the day, and would give the best advice in his power. She therefore persuaded Elijah to visit her at Laburnum Cottage, and there she told him her story, while the man listened like one spellbound.

"Ay, thou art a grand lass, Nancy," cried Elijah when she had finished; "the grandest lass I ever met!—And this is the stuff?"

"Yes, that is it. Now look here, Mr. Briggs, I want you to tell me something." She went to a drawer as she spoke, and took therefrom two pieces of sheeted rubber; these she placed before him. "Can you see any difference in those two sheets?" she asked.

Elijah Briggs was silent. He took the sheets, weighed them in his hands, scrutinised them closely, then laid them on the table.

"There seems a difference," he said, "but I can't tell what it is. But that's no wonder; rubber's not in my

line. If it were wool, I could tell you in a moment. In regard to this stuff I am out of my depth. Why do you ask, lass ? ”

“ One of them I made,” replied Nancy, “ and the other I bought. One is the best Para rubber which cannot be bought in the open market for less than eighteenpence a pound ; the other I can manufacture in any quantity for less than sixpence a pound.”

“ But, lass ! ” cried the Yorkshireman ; — “ if this is true there are *millions* in it ! Isn’t there a mistake somewhere ? ”

“ Where is it ? ” asked Nancy.

“ Has any practical use been made of your stuff ? ” asked Elijah. “ Has a rubber tyre been made of it ; or easier still, have a pair of rubber soles or heels been made of it ? ”

Nancy shook her head.

“ I’ve been afraid,” she whispered.

“ But it must be done before it’s of any use ! ” the Yorkshireman almost shouted.

“ Yes, I know. I want you to advise me.”

There was no doubt about it, Elijah was greatly interested. Keen business man as he was, he could see the almost infinite possibilities in such an invention. Why, if rubber could be made synthetically for less than sixpence a pound, the very streets of our cities could be paved with it ! The roar and rattle of Leeds could be stilled, while the fortune of the discoverer would be like that of Midas.

Elijah made Nancy tell him her story again ; made her tell it from the beginning. Like others he knew something of old Amos Judson’s Utopian dreams ; knew too that he had been a genius in his way ; knew that Mary had been trying to follow in her father’s footsteps, and had heard strange and almost unbelievable stories about her. But he knew nothing definite. Thus, as Nancy detailed everything to him, his astonishment knew no bounds.

One thing she kept from him, however. She told nothing of her experiences with Ben, but everything else she made known.

"I tell yo' what yo' mun do," burst out the Yorkshireman at length. He had become so excited that he lapsed into broad Yorkshire. "Yo' mun go to owd Jake Crowther."

"Whose he?"

"He knows more about rubber than anybody in Yorkshire," replied Elijah. "He's the chemist for Barraclough & Wilkins, the rubber manufacturers. He'll tell you if it's any use."

"Is he an able chemist?"

"In a way he is. He's what you might call self-taught; but he knows the business from A to Z. What he don't know about rubber isn't knowledge. But that's not enough. You must submit it to a well-known rubber expert whose name will carry weight in the scientific world."

"Do you know of such a one?" asked Nancy.

"Yes, I do. There's Professor Sheepshanks of the L—— University. If he says that the stuff you manufactured is real rubber, your fortune is made. Look here, lass, you can trust me, can't you?"

"Of course I can," cried the girl.

"Well then, I've never been one that's dealt with risky things. Perhaps I've been a bit old-fashioned; but it's paid me. Ask anyone in Leeds and you'll be told that if Elijah Briggs takes up anything it's safe."

"I know that," assented the girl eagerly.

"Anyhow, I'll do this," went on Elijah; "if old Jake Crowther and Professor Sheepshanks report that your stuff is as good as the rubber that's grown, I'll attend to the business end of the matter for you, and I will see that you are not cheated. But mind," and Mr. Briggs spoke sternly, "I'll have nowt to do with claptrap. If it won't bear the fullest investigation I won't touch it with a nine-foot pole. Nay, I wouldn't if it would save you from starving."

"I wouldn't want you to," replied Nancy proudly.

"I'm sure you wouldn't. But there, I'll do all in my power for you. Give me some of the stuff you made and I'll take it to Jake Crowther myself."

"And I'll take some more to Professor Sheepshanks. Oh, Mr. Briggs, you *are* good to me!"

"Nowt o' t' sort," exclaimed Mr. Briggs angrily. "I'd be willing to do a lot more than that. Ay, lass, I'd give half of what I've got to see you wed to our Ben; I would an' all. But there, you don't want to talk about that now; and I must be going."

Nancy went with him to the door and held it as if waiting for him to go out; but the Yorkshireman stood still.

"Nancy lass," he said presently, "I'm an old Methody, and I believe in th' owd Book."

"I know you do."

"Ay, I do, and I believe that your father knows all you have been doing and hoping; and I don't believe Mary Judson is far away from us at the very moment. I don't know if anything will come of this;—but ay, lass, your father must be proud of you! I'd give anything, *anything*, if you were my daughter," and he looked at the girl eagerly. "I wished it from the first day I saw you," he went on; "but I am afraid it's not possible. Good night, lass, and may the Lord answer your prayers."

Nancy's feelings during the next week are easier imagined than described. First there was her visit to London, where she had a long interview with the famous professor, and after that there were many days of weary waiting. What would the verdict be? Would her hopes be realized and she would be able to buy back her old home, or would everything be a mockery? Sometimes faith mounted on triumphant wings and success became almost certain; but at others she was sure that she had been following a will-o'-the-wisp, and that her hopes had been built on the baseless fabric of a dream.

The first definite news that came was from Elijah Briggs. He had driven late one night from Woodroyd,

to Laburnum Cottage to tell what he knew. When he was shown into the room Nancy's heart almost ceased to beat. She rose to meet him, but sat down immediately; her legs would not support her.

"Have you had a report?" she managed to say.

"Yes. I've just left Jake Crowther."

"Don't be afraid to let me know the worst." She articulated the words with difficulty.

"I am afraid the best is bad," replied Elijah bluntly.

"You mean to say then that it's not rubber?"

"I asked old Jake to come with me," replied Elijah, "he has been at Woodroyd all the evening—but he wouldn't come."

"It's a failure then!" The words were like a gasp.

Elijah sat looking at the floor for some seconds before replying. "Nay, he didn't say that;—and yet in a way he did. He said it were no use."

"He said it was not rubber?"

"Nay;—and that's where I couldn't quite make him out. He said it was rubber; but it was no use. He said it vulcanized all right, but that it had no tensile strength; that when he applied the same tests to it as he applied to grown rubber it crumbled like so much dust. And yet he stuck to it that in a way it was rubber."

"*In a way*," repeated Nancy slowly. "Did he give you a written report?"

"No, that's not in his line. Jake couldn't pass an examination as a chemist; he's only a practical man;—but he *knows*, he *knows*! I made him go over it and over it, again and again; but that's all I could get from him," went on Elijah. "He was mystified himself, was Jake. He told me that when he handled it at first he thought it was rubber; that even when he vulcanized it at first he thought it was good rubber; but yet when he applied other tests, it wouldn't stand them. And yet, mark you, all the time he called it rubber; and insisted that it *was* rubber. Look here, I'll have another try at persuading him to come to see you."

"No," replied Nancy, "I couldn't bear to see him. I really couldn't!"

"Poor little lass! Poor little lass!" said the Yorkshireman tenderly; "but don't give up! Jake would never have said what he did say unless there was *summat* in it. But he seemed to feel all the time that there was something wanting."

"*Something wanting*," repeated Nancy. They were the words Mary Judson used repeatedly. "*Something wanting*."

"I wish I had better news, lass," said Mr. Briggs when later he rose to leave the house; "but happen Professor Sheepshanks will be able to tell you what I can't."

This then was the end. She had done her all, and she had failed. For she had not the slightest hope that the great professor's verdict would be more favourable than that of Jake Crowther. It was true she had been able to obtain uniformity, but it was only uniformity of what was worthless.

When morning came she woke with a light heart. Why this should be she could not tell. She remembered every word Mr. Briggs had told her concerning Jake Crowther's report, and yet she was full of hope, full of gladness. It was a grim February morning too and a grey mist hung over the town while the cold, raw atmosphere sent the people shivering along the streets; and yet she felt that all was well.

When she came downstairs she found among her letters one from Professor Sheepshanks. It contained a lengthy report of what she had submitted to him, full of technical terms and scientific phrases which I will not attempt to reproduce here. In effect the great professor's verdict was almost identical with that of Jake Crowther. For practical purposes the stuff was useless. But there was one passage which she read over again and again and which made her heart throb wildly. It was not in the report itself, but formed a part of the letter which accompanied it.

"While I cannot report favourably on what you submitted to me," wrote the professor, "I cannot do less than congratulate you on a wonderful failure." At first I believed you had succeeded. In appearance it is identical with the best Para rubber. More than that, after a careful analysis of those ingredients which make rubber I find that what you have synthetically made, contains exactly the same ingredients and in practically the same quantity. Up to a certain point moreover your production stands all the necessary tests; it is only when I go beyond this point that it fails. To put it in a word, you are within an ace of complete success. Your synthesis seems perfect, it is only when one gets beyond the point I mentioned that it breaks down."

It was this that excited Nancy. After Elijah Briggs's report of what Jake Crowther had said she had expected failure; but this had given her boundless hope.

"Within an ace of complete success," she repeated to herself again and again.

It was a great deal, coming as it did from such a man. Professor Sheepshanks had an almost world-wide reputation, not only as chemist of the highest standing, but as one who carefully weighed every word before using it.

And he had congratulated her upon a "glorious failure." Such words coming from such a man were almost as good as success.

She went singing to her work that morning, and even the streets of Leeds looked beautiful, while the roar of John Shawcross's machinery sounded like music in her ears.

That night found her again in the laboratory. She *would* succeed! It was out of the question that having got so near to success she should give up trying.

February passed away, March came to an end, and when April came she was still at work. On examining the results of her labour, however, she had to confess that she had not discovered the one thing wanting. Neither

did she know what it was. She had studied every book she could hear of bearing on the subject, which she thought was likely to help her. All in vain. The thing she wanted was as elusive as a spirit.

When May came she determined on a new course of procedure. She had been repeatedly informed that in Germany—that land of great scientists—rubber, although not being manufactured on a commercial basis, had been synthetically produced. She therefore went to Leipzig where lived an old German *savant* who was reported to have synthetically made rubber which would bear every test known to the scientific world. She found Herr Luther to be a most accessible old gentleman. He was a typical German, somewhat brusque in manner, and not overclean in his person ; but a scientist to the fingertips. He was willing to talk too ; but Nancy's interview with him was altogether disappointing. Herr Luther had to confess that he had not made rubber, all he claimed was that he had made a substitute for rubber, and which could only be used to advantage in the event of a scarcity of the real thing. In fact, the old Doctor's production cost something like six shillings a pound, and thus, as he admitted, could never be a rival to the real article.

Thus Nancy's visit to Germany was a failure. And yet not altogether so. Her talk with the old German had set her mind working on new lines, and determined her to continue her investigations on her return to Leeds.

But time became more and more valuable. She realized that the sands of her life, as far as the option was concerned, were fast running out. Four out of the five years had now practically gone, and if she did not succeed soon, her very success might be a mockery as far as buying back Trevanion Court was concerned.

She remembered not only what Ben Briggs had told her, but what Elijah had also confirmed. Even although she were entirely successful, and went to the world with Professor Sheepshanks' favourable verdict, it would take considerable time to convince the British Public of its

commercial value. And she knew that old Jack Beel would be as adamant as Shylock was in Shakespeare's play.

June came and still she had not progressed an inch. Again and again she produced rubber, but it was only rubber that crumbled like dust when put to the final tests. The fourth anniversary of the day of the sale was drawing near, thus leaving her only a year more. A great longing possessed her. She must go to Cornwall and she must again feast her eyes upon her old home.

"The world's different down there," she reflected "The air is clear and keen. There I can revel in God's sunlight, there the sea is really blue."

John Shawcross made no demur when she told him she wanted to get away again for a few days. Trade had been booming with John Shawcross in spite of the depression which prevailed in Leeds generally. His cretonnes and chintzes had found favour with the British Public, and he saw great days ahead.

"All right," he exclaimed; "go and enjoy yourself, Miss Trevanion. You'll need a bit of rest now, for we are going to have a busy season directly the holidays are over."

Thus it was that Nancy, following Mary Judson's example, placed all her important papers in the strong room of her bank, and on a bright June morning started early for Cornwall. She had no particular reason for going: she only knew she must go. Of John Trefry she had not heard a word since his letter telling her of the post he had been offered in South America. Whether he had gone there she was not sure, and of his exact whereabouts she knew nothing.

On her arrival at Leeds Station, early as it was, she saw Ben Briggs. She had met him several times since the night on which he had given her back old Amos Judson's formula, but never once had he mentioned the matter, nor had he spoken of the hopes she was sure he still cherished. Ben was now a candidate for Parliament. He had declined

the overtures which had been made to him in Cornwall and had elected to accept an invitation from a constituency in Yorkshire. He was very assiduous in his attentions to her. He obtained a quantity of literature for her, and attended to the many little things which would add to her comfort during the journey.

"Have you had any success yet?" he asked as he stood at the door of a first-class carriage, and watched while her luggage was placed on the rack.

She shook her head.

Ben smiled complacently.

"Nancy," he said, "I haven't changed: you will remember that, won't you?"

The girl was silent.

"You thought hard things about me when I got Sarah Ellen to steal the formula, but you know why I did it," he went on. "I'd give all I have and all I am for you to love me, Nancy. Is there any hope?"

Still Nancy was silent. She could not help admiring the dogged persistency, the unflinching determination; and she almost felt glad that in his desire to win her he had tried to make her work a failure.

"Is there anyone else?" and there was anxiety in his voice.

Nancy thought of John Trefry and remembered his last letter.

"No, Mr. Ben, there is no one else," she said.

"Do leave off the Mister, Nancy. You are sure there is no one else?"

"Yes, sure."

"Then I'm going to win! No, don't shake your head; I am. And you shall have Trevanion Court again, Nancy."

The train moved out of the station with those words ringing in her ears. They seemed like a prophecy.

An hour later all thoughts of Ben had gone. Leeds and her life in Leeds were things of the past; she was going home. She had written Mrs. Uren telling her of her proposed visit, and was trying to draw pictures of

the cottage by the sea, and in the eye of imagination saw her old home which stood only a mile or so away.

Yes, she was going home! Soon she would breathe her native air again; soon she would hear the beloved Cornish speech and know all that it meant to her!

The country-side was in the summer of its loveliness, and directly the train had crossed Saltash Bridge she felt as though she was in a new world. Almost mechanically she lifted one of her bags from the rack, and took from it some sheets of rubber she had made. Why she had brought them she did not know, but brought them she had. She had also taken some sheets of Para rubber and placed them in the same bag. A pungent, almost sickly smell pervaded the compartment. Yes, they were identical in appearance, identical in smell, identical in everything;—and yet the one was a valuable commodity while the other was rubbish. Oh why——?

She remembered Professor Sheepshanks' letter, called to mind every word he had written. If she could only find that one thing lacking!—the one thing which would change everything!

The train swept on. She passed sleepy stations, crossed over viaducts, swept down the glorious valley towards Bodmin Road. Oh, if only she could . . .

An hour later she had even forgotten her dreams. The train was nearing the little roadside station only three miles from Mrs. Ufen's cottage. . . .

Her heart gave a wild leap. The train was drawing up at the platform. She saw the stationmaster who had known her as a child, saw the porter who years before had carried her luggage when she went to school. Saw—— She opened the carriage door without realising what she was doing, then with hands outstretched she exclaimed:

"John—it is John!"

CHAPTER XXVII

THE ONE THING LACKING

"**W**HY haven't you written? . . . I thought you were in South America; and—and I haven't heard a word from you. . . . Where have you been? . . . Why are you here?"

Her heart was beating so wildly that she hardly knew what she was saying. Forgetful of who might be looking, or who might be listening, she held both John Trefry's hands in hers and was looking eagerly into his face.

"I heard you were coming, Nancy. Mrs. Uren told me," John informed her presently. "That's why I am here to meet you. You'll forgive me, won't you? I—I couldn't help coming."

"Forgive you! Why, it's lovely—*everything's* lovely! The sound of the sea, the hills, the wild flowers. I don't know why I've come, but I couldn't help coming."

"I was going to write you, Nancy," John said. They were side by side in an old Ford motor car which Mrs. Uren had secured for her.

"But why haven't I heard from you before?"

"I meant to write; but when things—turned out as they did—I couldn't."

"What do you mean? Have you been to South America?"

"Yes, I went there;—that was the trouble. The company I told you about turned out to be a frost, and everything was a fiasco. So I came home.—I finished that book I told you about, Nancy." This last sentence he said eagerly.

It was unlike John Trefry to volunteer information

in this way. Usually he was very reserved and had to be questioned concerning his doings before he would tell anything. There was a change in his appearance too ; he looked more confident, spoke with more assurance.

"Have you got it published?"

John nodded. "I suppose it's a success," he added.

"I am so glad!" cried the girl with sparkling eyes. "Tell me about it, John."

John was silent for a little time, then he went on. "I didn't write you from South America because everything was such a farce. I spent nearly all my savings too ; and I felt I couldn't tell you about another failure. You can understand, can't you, Nancy?"

Of course she could understand, and she felt ashamed of herself for harbouring hard thoughts about him. She had thought he had forgotten her, while all the while——

"I have been home for several months now," went on John. "I wanted to finish the book and get it published. Of course it isn't bringing me much money, although the publishers tell me it will in time ; but it's brought me something else."

"What?" asked the girl.

"Promotion in my old firm," replied John. "I have been made manager and chief engineer. It doesn't mean much yet ; but it will. I've six hundred a year now," he added, "and I'm promised a post up the country in two years. That will mean a thousand a year. Why, if you compare that with what I had, I am a rich man."

"Oh, John!" exclaimed the girl.

For a time the possession of Trevanion Court dropped into the background. The words Ben Briggs had spoken to her that morning were forgotten ; one fact obscured everything else on earth : she was seated at John Trefry's side.

The old car only crawled along the road ; in fact, it ought to have been thrown to the scrap-heap years before, but neither John nor Nancy minded. John rejoiced that he was no longer a failure, and that because of it

he could tell Nancy what was in his heart; while she by the thousand things which makes a woman wise, knew what was in John's heart.

"I suppose you've no hope of buying back Trevanion Court?" asked John presently.

She shook her head.

"That's been in my heart all the time," said John, watching her face, "that's why——"

"Why what, John?"

The old car struggled up the steep hill-side making almost as much noise as a traction engine, but the two heeded it not.

"I wanted to buy it back for you," went on John. "I wanted—but I can't buy it. Perhaps I never shall—I don't suppose I ever shall. But I'm no longer a failure.—Nancy, could you?—Could you?——"

"Yes, John!"

"You know what's in my heart; what I've wanted to say for years, but have not dared to say. My dreams are only half fulfilled, and I'm only at the bottom of the ladder even yet;—but do you *mean* yes?"

"Of course I do," and the girl's eyes were tear-dimmed. "I've always meant yes."

Not a word more was said, but John's hand found Nancy's and he held it fast. The man who drove the old motor car didn't see this, in fact he saw nothing. All his attention was given to the old Ford which he hoped almost against hope would reach Mrs. Uren's cottage, without breaking down.

"I suppose you are an authority in the electrical world now?" asked the girl after the two had partaken of the meal which Mrs. Uren had prepared.

"People seem to think I know something about it," replied the young man diffidently. "By George, I've worked hard!" he added, as if speaking to himself.

"So have I. John, I want to show you something; to tell you something.—You remember Miss Judson, who was with me when I was here last?"

"Yes, perfectly."

"She's dead;—and I'm her heiress. No, she didn't leave much; at least, she left a cottage and two hundred pounds, besides—what hasn't come to anything."

"What do you mean, Nancy?" The girl had spoken stammeringly, and John could not understand.

"I wanted to tell you when I was here last; but it was a secret—and it wasn't my secret. That's why my lips were sealed. Of course," she added, "it wouldn't have mattered if I had told you. Still——"

Thereupon Nancy told the story of Mary Judson; of the legacy which had been left to her by her father, and what had been in her heart to do. Told also of her own promise, of the long years of work and what they had resulted in.

"Did Sheepshanks say *that*!" cried John, excitedly when she had finished. There was a new tone in his voice; a tone which suggested not only admiration of the great man's position; but of interest, of excitement.

"I have his letter here," cried the girl. "I don't know why I brought it, but I did."

John almost snatched it from her hand, and having read it once read it again.

"Have you his report?"

"Yes, I brought that too."

John was silent for some minutes after he had read it, then he burst out suddenly: "And the stuff, Nancy?—have you brought that with you?"

"You'll laugh at me, John," cried the girl; "but I did. I felt as though I couldn't separate myself from it altogether. I was looking at it in the train coming down. I—I—— But there, I'll show it you."

She eagerly ran upstairs and returned with a newspaper containing two sheets of rubber. John took them from her without a word, and a minute later he had even forgotten that Nancy was by his side. He was examining them with eager and almost feverish attention, his hands shook as he held them.

For some seconds he did not speak; his whole attention was rivetted on the two pieces of rubber he held in his hand.

"John," cried Nancy excitedly, "tell me what you think."

But John continued to be silent; he might not have heard her.

"One of these is natural rubber," he said at length, "and the other——"

"I made," broke in Nancy. "Can you see any difference in them?"

"Yes."

"What is it? I asked Mr. Briggs and he could not tell me; he was not even sure there was a difference."

"There is a tremendous difference."

"Yes, but what is it?"

For some seconds he did not reply. Then he spoke more like a man talking to himself, than one answering a question. "*The difference between the two is like the difference between a sleeping man and a dead man,*" he said slowly.

"And which is which?" asked the girl excitedly. "Tell me that."

"That," said John, laying one piece before her, "is natural rubber; the other——"

"Yes," broke in the girl, "you are right. But how did you know? Mr. Briggs couldn't tell, and—and you've just read what Professor Sheepshanks said."

"That," said John, placing his hand upon the natural rubber, "*is alive, the other is dead. That's the difference; it's the difference between life and death.*"

"And that's why the synthetic rubber won't bear the tests," said Nancy.

He had put into a word what for months she had been feeling. The natural rubber was alive, the made rubber was dead.

"If only that could be infused with life," continued John, "it would be one of the greatest discoveries of

the age. And yet it isn't altogether dead, there are some suggestions of life in it. That's what I can't understand. Let me read the report Sheepshanks sent again."

He eagerly devoured every word the professor had written. What to Nancy had been difficult to understand he appeared to grasp without effort; all the technical phrases and scientific terms seemed a part of his everyday life; he was weighing every sentence, marking every item the great man had made use of.

Meanwhile Nancy, excited beyond words, commenced walking round the room. Presently she picked up the piece of newspaper in which the two pieces of rubber had been wrapped. It was part of an old copy of the *Yorkshire Post*, and was mainly made up of advertisements. Almost mechanically she began to smooth out the crumpled newspaper; then, as if some one had struck her, she suddenly stopped.

"Look here, John," she said with a laugh, as she pointed to an advertisement in the paper.

It was a picture of a man who wore some kind of belt, and from the belt sparks of light flashed. Underneath the picture were the words printed in large letters:

"ELECTRICITY IS LIFE!"

John followed the direction of her finger and also saw the words. Then their eyes met.

"Great Heavens, Nancy!" he exclaimed.

"It's only a quack advertisement, and of course——"

"Yes, but it's true!—don't you see? Why——"

John's lips were trembling, his eyes were burning with an unnatural light.

"Nancy," he cried, "describe it all to me again."

"Describe what?"

"Describe what you did, describe everything, don't miss a single detail. Wait a minute, though; have you got that formula?"

"No, it's in my Bank, but I know every word of it."

"Could you write it down?"

"Of course I could."

The tensy of the man's feelings was infectious, and Nancy's fingers trembled as she wrote from memory Amos Judson's formula:

"Why, these are ordinary things, they are of every-day use, they can be obtained anywhere. Glucose—treacle—starch——"

"Yes, yes!"

"Now tell me exactly what you did."

Faithfully and minutely the girl described what she had so often done in Mary Judson's laboratory.

"Yes, I see!" cried John. "You put them into a pan, screwed it down, then you arranged for a steady heat for two hours. It was heat from an electrical current, you say?"

"Yes, we used the ordinary current."

"What voltage?"

"Two hundred and fifty."

"And how was this current applied?"

Nancy described it.

"Look here," cried John excitedly; "you told me that for a long time Mary Judson's difficulty was to obtain uniformity in the results; was there any difference in the application of the electricity?"

He went on asking her questions; keen searching questions, all bearing on the electrical part of her experiments.

"What do you mean, John?" she asked at length.

"What are you driving at?"

"This stuff's dead;—don't you see? It wants life, and electricity is life. If you can charge that stuff with electricity, you've charged it with life, and then it ceases to be dead."

"But—but——"

"I've got it!" John interrupted her, "I'm sure I have! That stuff," pointing to the natural rubber, "grew on a tree, it was exuded from a living organism; it was living, it is living. This is manufactured stuff, is dead; what it wants is life, and electricity is life. Good night, Nancy."

By the way, you can trust me with this formula, 'can't you? "

"Why, of course I can trust you with anything. But what do you mean? "

John was silent, he was eagerly reading the items. "Yes, they are just ordinary things," he said, "but I can't get them nearer than Plymouth." He made some rapid calculations and then went on. "I must go now, Nancy, but you must come to my laboratory to-morrow evening. I shall be ready by that time."

"But—but, John!——"

John scarcely heeded her, his eyes continued to burn with unnatural light; every nerve was in tension.

"Forgive me for going now, Nancy; I am in a hurry."

"But, John——" and she looked at him pleadingly.

John caught the look in her eyes, and in a moment he had ceased to be a scientist, and became a lover.

"My darling!" he murmured as he held her close to him. And then followed many foolish words which there is no need to write down.

In the early hours of the morning John was seated alone in a motor-car and was driving furiously towards Plymouth.

"These are the things, aren't they? And that is the same kind of pan, isn't it? I've tried to reproduce exactly the same conditions. Have I succeeded? "

"Yes, exactly."

"Now then, put them in the pan exactly as you did in Leeds."

The girl obeyed him.

It was the afternoon of the next day, and Nancy and John were alone in the latter's laboratory.

"I've made it twice already," laughed the young man. "The first time it wasn't so good, but the second time it turned up trumps. Still, I wanted you to see it with your own eyes. You see what I've done, don't you? I've inserted an electric wire *inside* the pan, so that there

will be a steady current all the time the stuff is being heated."

"Then you believe——?"

John explained his process to her and enlarged upon the power of electricity to give artificial life to apparently dead matter.

Hours later both John and Nancy were poring over a great lump of dark, sticky-looking substance, Nancy uttering many exclamations of delight.

"We'll get this sheeted as soon as it's cooler," went on John—he was his own quiet self now; "after that I'll vulcanize it. Nancy, my dear, I see in this stuff one of the greatest discoveries of the age."

"And I see my old home!" the girl almost sobbed. "I see—I see—— Oh, John!"

It was after ten o'clock when Nancy and John made their way back to Mrs. Uren's cottage, and both were very quiet during their walk. It had been a wonderful day.

"John," cried the girl after a long silence, "you and I are going to Trevanion Court to-morrow morning."

"I wouldn't if I were you," said John.

"But why?"

"Because nothing is certain yet. You remember the old adage:

There is many a slip
Twixt cup and lip,

and it's very true. Anyhow, there is bound to be delay; even at the best it will take a long time before we can be certain."

"How long?" asked the girl.

"It may be months, perhaps years."

"Years? Why, then I should be too late! In a year from to-day the option will have expired."

"At any rate, don't do anything rash."

"Oh, if you only knew how excited I am, and how I want to see the place purged from every suggestion of a Beel!"

"I think I know."

"And—and you believe you've done it, don't you, John?"

"I am sure," replied John with conviction.

"And your name will go down as one of the greatest scientific discoverers of the time," cried the girl. "Oh, I am proud of you!"

"It wasn't I at all; I should have been able to do nothing without you. It's all you, Nancy."

"No, it wasn't; it was Mary Judson and her father. Fancy old Amos Judson working all those years in the dark and to have no credit for it. But he shall have it!" cried the girl, "if it turns out as we hope it will."

"It will," cried John with conviction.

"Then when it does, every one shall know the truth," Nancy asserted. "Oh, John, I am longing to have Professor Sheepshanks' opinion."

"There will be heaps of things to do," said John. "Everything will have to be patented; then money will have to be raised; a company will have to be formed, and all sorts of arrangements made. If it's to be anything at all, it'll have to be a very big thing. That will mean a new factory; it will mean a buying and selling organization. Oh, it will mean a tremendous amount of hard work."

"Yes, and that seems very prosy, doesn't it?" complained the girl. "What I want is to do something dramatic."

"I tell you how you can do something dramatic," and John looked ardently at Nancy.

"What?"

"Let's get married right away. I can afford to do so now."

"It would be lovely!" cried the girl.

"Let's arrange for it, then."

The girl's eyes flashed as she heard the eagerness in his voice, and her hand quivered as it held his arm.

"No," she said at length; "when I'm married it shall

be from Trevanion Court. I'll drive from there to the church, our old church, down yonder; and then you and I will come back together to the old home."

"But that will mean such a long time waiting, Nancy."

"It'll have to be," said Nancy imperiously. "But I love you for your suggestion, John."

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE OLD HOME

OLD Jack Beel sat with his son under the portico of Trevanion Court. It was now September, and although it was not yet four o'clock the sun was already beginning to sink over the western hills. Sitting with his pipe in his mouth, Old Jack complacently looked across the broad expanse of land towards the sea which lay a little more than two miles away.

"Very 'ot," said Old Jack presently, "'otter than it was in August."

Young Jack nodded. He also was seated in a canvas chair and looking towards Trevanion village.

"You've 'ad a good 'arvest, haven't 'ee?"

"Yes, I've had a good harvest."

"All the same I was a fool," and Old Jack spoke testily.

Young Jack did not speak, but looked towards his father as if for explanation.

"Eight thousand pound," the old man almost snarled; "eight thousand pound; and that at five per cent do maake vower 'undred a year. The plaace edn' wuth et."

"I don't know so much about that," replied Young Jack. "I've made it pay its way, even on the basis of paying you four hundred a year rent. Why, those two broccoli fields will bring me in at least four hundred pounds this coming winter. The land is rich, and being on the warm side it grows the best broccoli in the county."

"That may be; all the saame, I wuddn' 'a bought it but for that maid. I thought you would 'ave got 'er, Jack."

"I mean to get her yet," replied Jack grimly. "And when I do I'll bring her down a peg."

Old Jack looked at his son admiringly; he liked the spirit manifested by his words.

"Poor and proud; tha's what she es," said the old man contemptuously. " 'Ere we be in Trevanion Court, the owners of it, while she is up in Leeds, workin' for a weekly wage."

Young Jack nodded. "She hasn't given up hopes of buying it back, though," he asserted.

"How do 'ee knaw?"

"Because I've taken the trouble to find out."

" 'Ow ded 'ee vind out?"

"I got hold of a fellow who was going to Leeds, and I asked him to make inquiries about her."

"And do she still work for that manufacturer?"

"She did up to a month ago."

"Ah!" cried Old Jack with satisfaction; "she'll never git ten thousand pound that way."

Young Jack laughed.

"I am told she had a wage of six hundred a year," he said.

"Well, she caan't save ten thousand pound out of that! And she shall never have it back, Jack; mind that," and the old man brought his fist down on his knee.

"No, she shan't," replied Young Jack. "Except on my terms," he added. "And they'll bring down her pride a bit."

Silence fell between the two for nearly a minute, during which time the old man watched his son closely.

"You 'aven't made it up with Selina Nancarrow yet, I suppose?" he asked.

"No, and I'm going to do nothing for a bit."

"Be 'ee still gone on that Trevanion maid, then?"

"Gone on her!" cried Young Jack, "I shall be always gone on her. All the same, I'd give my immortal soul to bring her pride down a peg."

"That's the spirit," and the old man laughed almost gleefully. "I wonder why she's coming here this afternoon," he added.

"Coming here!" and Young Jack started to his feet excitedly. "Coming here! Who said she was coming here?"

"I did. That's why I'm 'ere myself. I shouldn't have took the trouble to come over from Ashbarton this 'ot day but for the letter I got from 'er."

"You got a letter from her?"

Old Jack nodded.

"From Nancy?"

"Of course I 'ave."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"I wanted to see which way the wind blowed," the old man said. "Here's the letter; you can read et ef you like."

"DEAR SIR,—

"As I happen to be in Cornwall, I propose coming to Trevanion Court on Wednesday afternoon about four o'clock. I hope it will be possible for you to meet me. It is important that I see both you and your son.

"Yours sincerely,

"NANCY TREVANION."

Young Jack looked at his watch.

"Why, it's nearly four o'clock now," he cried. "If I'd known this——"

"You'd 'a put on another suit of clothes, I spoase?" laughed his father. "Well, I dedn' want 'ee to know. Why should you go prinking yourself up for that maid? You ded enough of that years ago, and there must be no more of it. Tell 'ee what, Jack, she do know that the time of the option will soon be over, and she's gittin' anxious. That's the meaning of et. 'Tis no use your putting on the airs of a country squire; you be a working farmer, and that's how you must mit 'er."

"All the same," cried Young Jack, rising from his seat, "I'll go and change these togs."

"You ain't got the time. Why, there she es comin' up the drive now."

Young Jack saw that his father had spoken the truth. Coming up the drive, daintily clad and smiling, was Nancy Trevanion.

The two men watched her as she drew nearer the house; saw her look first at the old buildings and then away across the undulating country-side.

She did not see them. They were partially hidden by the portico and, while they could see her plainly, they were nearly hidden from her view.

"Watch 'er," whispered the old man. "Proud minx, edn' she?"

• Young Jack did not speak, the dreams of years came back to him as he looked, and he felt that in spite of everything here was the goal of his heart's desire.

"Anybody might think she was still the owner of it all," muttered Old Jack; "but I'll haive 'er know. I'll stand no nonsense. Now mind, my boy, whatever she do want you mustn' give way an inch, not an inch."

The girl was standing in the middle of the drive looking round her. It was easy to see that she was dwelling lovingly on all she saw. The gnarled old trees, the lichen-covered walls, the flowers which, in spite of neglect, still bloomed gaily. She stood for perhaps nearly a minute drinking in the beauty of the scene; then it might have been that memories of the past came back to her. Her lips quivered, and she dashed away the tears from her eyes.

• Both men drew their own conclusions. This girl, almost the last relic of the Trevanion race, was mourning over past glories.

"See that?" chuckled the old man. "She'd look fine an' wisht. I wonder what she's coming for."

In his endeavours to watch every movement Old Jack moved his chair, and the noise caused Nancy to look in his direction. She saw that they were watching her.

Old Jack rose to meet her.

"Well, you be come to 'ave another look at the plaace I spoase? Well, 'tes nat'ral like."

"Good evening, Mr. Beel," said Nancy as she came up. "You got my letter?"

"Aas, I got it, and I've bin wondering what you wanted to see we for. Waan't 'ee sit down? 'Tes a warm evenin', and perhaps you be a bit tired."

"No, I am not tired; but it is a fairly long walk from Trevanion village, and as you say it's warm."

"Jack, go in the 'ouse and fetch another chair."

"Pray don't," replied Nancy, "I prefer standing. It's very beautiful here," she added.

"People like we ain't got much time to think 'bout that sort of thing," asserted Old Jack. He watched her as with beauty-loving eyes she looked at hill and dale.

"It d' seem to agree weth 'ee up the country," went on the old farmer. "You be looking fine an' well."

In spite of what he had said to his son he was somewhat uneasy. The girl's very presence created an atmosphere that was unpleasant; it made him think of the time when he was a groom there in her grandfather's days. Besides, simply as she was dressed, she had the air of the grand lady, and although he would not confess it to himself he felt common.

"Well," he asserted, "I got your letter and 'ere we be. You said you wanted to see us both, and we be ready to talk. 'Ave the option got anything to do with it?" and although he laughed confidently there was a suggestion of doubt in his manner.

"Yes, I did want to speak to you about the option," replied the girl.

"When I knawed you was comin', I went to my safe and got out the papers; I've brought them with me, in fact. 'Tes all plain in black and white. There's onnly a few months more," he added.

"I know. And I was wondering——"

"Aas, what was 'ee wondering?" he broke in when he saw her hesitate.

"The option expires in about nine months," Nancy

said. "I was wondering whether I could persuade you to extend the time."

Old Jack chuckled gleefully. "You was, was 'ee?"

"Yes," and the girl watched him keenly. "You see, ten thousand pounds is a lot of money."

Again Old Jack laughed. Her words rather than her manner pleased him; she had come to him as a suppliant.

"Aas, 'tes a lot of money, and you caan't pick up ten thousand pounds like you can pick so many blackberries. But a bargain is a bargain."

"Yes, I am quite aware that legally——"

"Aas, *legally*," interrupted the old man. "Old Lawyer Hendy drawed it up, ded'n' a? 'Ee ded 'is best for 'ee too, but law is law, miss, and we must stick to the law."

"You mean to say that you insist on our standing by the letter of the arrangement?"

"It's all 'ere in black and white, and although a lawyer drawed it up, nothin' couldn't be plainer. The option was for five year, and ef you didn't pay down the ten thousand pound on the fifteenth of June then——" the old man spread his coarse hands significantly.

"I was thinking whether for old times' sake you wouldn't make some concession," suggested the girl.

Old Jack looked at his son and decided to alter his tactics.

"What concession?" he asked. "What 'ave 'ee got in your mind? Leave us 'ear 'ee."

"I was wondering whether you couldn't give me some extension of time."

"Extension of time? What do 'ee main?"

"As I said, ten thousand pounds is a lot of money to find all at once. Suppose I could find five thousand by the fifteenth of June, and then pay you, say, a thousand a year during the next five years."

"Could 'ee do that?" he asked eagerly; "could 'ee git five thousand pound by the fifteenth of June?"

"I might."

There was greed, cupidity, craftiness in his eyes.

"And what about interest and compound interest during the last five years?" he asked.

"I was thinking how that might be a matter of arrangement."

At this point Young Jack broke in. "Miss Nancy," he said, "I am afraid we parted on bad terms when I saw you last—I was a fool, and I know it—and I'm very sorry if I said or did anything to offend you. I haven't altered," he continued, "and if——"

"We won't discuss that, if you please," broke in the girl, and there was hauteur in her voice.

Old Jack, who was watching her closely, knew by the look on her face how she regarded his son, and he was angry accordingly.

"Don't you be a fool, Jack," the old man snarled. "I be still maaster 'ere, mind that." Then turning to Nancy he went on: "Ah, and so you was thinkin' that I might be willin' to take 'alf the ten thousand pound so that the place is yours again. Well, you shall 'ave my answer oal pat and plain. No, miss, not a day and not an hour beyond the fifteenth of June will I go. Ef you do come to me one minute after the clock strikes twelve on that day, and offer me the money, I wudden' take it. There, that's straight talkin', edn' it?"

"Quite straight," replied Nancy, "and easy to understand."

"Ah, I be glad you'd find it aisy to understand."

"I was thinking," replied Nancy, "that if you had been willing to make concessions, I might be willing to make some concessions too."

"You maake concessions! What concessions? I don't want no concessions. A bargain es a bargain."

"I also have been reading the conditions of the sale," Nancy went on, "and one of the conditions was that everything in the house and on the farm should be kept in good order. I have been looking around the place, and I notice that a good deal of money will have to be spent to put everything in the same state of repair as it

was when you bought it. As you say, a bargain is a bargain; I shall have to insist on that. I notice also that Mr. Hendy did not mention anything about giving you notice. It is plainly stated in the option that on any date within the term of five years, I could, by paying you ten thousand pounds, claim possession—in other words, that I could turn you out without a minute's notice. I didn't mean to adopt this attitude, but you have forced me into it."

"What do 'ee main?" snarled Old Jack. "Do 'ee main to tell me you've got ten thousand pounds?"

"Why not?" asked the girl smilingly.

"But wh—where ded 'ee git it?" the old man stammered.

"That's rather like my own business, isn't it?"

"You can't do et!" he shouted, "no law in the land would allow 'ee to do et. I'll fight 'ee to the last ditch! Come now, I'd know something about the law. The condition of the sale was that I 'ave complete and entire possession until——"

"I decide to take up the option," broke in Nancy.

"Well, where's your money? 'Ave 'ee got it with 'ee?"

"One doesn't carry ten thousand pounds in one's pocket," replied Nancy quietly.

"Then where's your banker's reference? Laive me see et! No, no, I bean't to be played with."

Old Jack, on seeing the look in Nancy's eyes, became both angry and fearful. He did not understand her quiet demeanour, her air of confidence. Perhaps that was why he became truculent.

"And now I'll trouble you to get off the plaace," he demanded. "Whether you do know it or not you be trespassing, and I be terrible 'ard on trespassers. No, no, you may be a Trevanion and you may look 'pon we Beels dirt under yer feet, as your father and your grandfather did afore 'ee; but I'll let 'ee know that I bean't to be played with."

"That's very nice of you," replied Nancy, whose quick

ears had at that moment caught the sound of wheels. "There's Lawyer Hendy's car coming down the drive just now," she added.

"Lawyer 'endy! Then—then you d' *main* it!"

"Certainly I mean it."

Lawyer Hendy got out of his car, taciturn but urbane.

"Good evening, Beel. I judge that my client has already had a talk with you."

"Yes, we've had a fairly long chat," and there was a smile on Nancy's face as she spoke. "I've been trying to come to an arrangement with Mr. Beel, but he insists upon standing by the letter of the agreement."

"That's a pity," replied Mr. Hendy, looking at Old Jack—"for him," he added. There was something in the lawyer's voice, as well as in his words, that made Old Jack feel more than afraid. It had been his boast for years that he was a match for any lawyer in the land. As a consequence he had always refused to employ one. Even on the occasion of his buying Trevanion Court he would not engage a lawyer to examine the deeds. He insisted on doing everything himself.

"Why is it a pity?" he managed to say.

"Knowing that my client was coming to see you, and that she had important negotiations in her mind, I have naturally made careful arrangements. On examining the documents which you signed on the fifteenth of June, more than four years ago, I find it clearly stated that in the event of Miss Trevanion paying you ten thousand pounds at any time during the said five years, Trevanion Court should be hers again without any qualification whatever. That, according to the letter of the law, would include all crops, all corn stacks, and——"

"But—but it caan't main that! For the Loard's sake doan't say it do main that!"

"Without qualifications?" repeated the lawyer. "What can it mean else? It's a pity for your sake, Mr. Beel, that you were not willing to meet Miss Trevanion on a friendly footing."

A few minutes later Old Jack had, to use the lawyer's term, "entirely crumpled up." Keen witted as he was, he was no match for the astute man of the law, and thus instead of being truculently virulent he became a whining suppliant.

"You can't main it, Maaster 'endy! you cān't main it! Ef you do, why—why I shall lose thousands of pounds."

"I am only stating the law," replied the old solicitor, "and you insisted upon abiding by that."

"And do you main to say that Miss Trevanion is in a position to——"

"I mean to say that I am here to take up the option," broke in the lawyer, "and that I am ready to pay to your solicitor on Miss Trevanion's behalf the sum of ten thousand pounds—say to-morrow."

"But I ain't got no solicitors!" cried Old Jack. "They be a pack of rogues, every one ov 'em, and I would never 'ave nothin' to do with 'em."

"Well, to your bankers then," went on Mr. Hendy imperturbably. "Shall we meet at Truro to-morrow—say at eleven o'clock? I've all the papers ready, and the manager will doubtless——"

"No, no," broke in Nancy, who by this time pitied Old Jack. "I am not going to insist on the letter of the law so strictly as that. Everything that is rightfully yours shall be taken at a valuation, and every penny that you can rightfully claim shall be paid."

"Besides the ten thousand pound!"

"Besides the ten thousand pounds."

"But good Loard—where—where's oal the money comin' from?"

"It'll be all right," replied Nancy. "Only one thing I must insist on, Mr. Beel; this old house must be vacated at once. I am sorry to inconvenience you in any way, but I must insist on that. Still, as I have heard you say many times, Trevanion Court isn't fit for a farmer, and as there is a convenient house not a quarter of a mile

away and conveniently situated, I must ask you to remove into that at once."

"The old Dower 'Ouse?" gasped Old Jack.

"Exactly, the old Dower House, and you can stay there until Christmas. This house, however, I must have at once; *at once*, Mr. Beel. I am coming here to live again; I'm going to have it filled with the things I love, and I'm going to spend next Christmas here."

"She must have come into a fortin', Jack," said the old man as soon as Lawyer Hendy and Nancy had gone, "and it must be a big fortin' too, else she cudd'n do et! But she've 'a bait us, my booy; she've 'a bait us!"

But Young Jack did not answer a word.

For the next three months the whole district around Trevanion Court, including Trevanion village, was agog with excitement. Gossip was rife and astonishment knew no bounds. Both Jack Beel and his son were questioned by many people, and in many ways, but both refused to give any answer. It was known, however, that they had vacated Trevanion Court, and that Young Jack had gone back to Ashwater Barton to live with his father.

It was known, moreover, that there were great doings at the old house. Strange workmen were there, while towards November wagon-loads of furniture were deposited there. Gardeners were also at work restoring the grounds to their one-time beauty. Then as Christmas drew near, trim-looking servant maids, in snowy linen, were seen to be tripping round.

"She must be spendin' thousands of pounds!" the villagers said. "Where can she have got et oal, I wonder?"

But no one knew; no one dreamed the truth. All that was known was that Miss Nancy Trevanion was coming back to her old home again, and although there were some who were envious, nearly all rejoiced.

On Christmas Eve there was quite a little commotion at the railway station. Several motor-cars were drawn up as if awaiting the coming train, and both the station-

master and the porters talked knowingly as to what it might portend. Then when the train stopped a number of strangers alighted who stepped into the motor-cars and were driven away in the direction of Trevanion Court.

"Ay, Nancy, I am glad to see thee, lass. This is grand; it's fair grand! It is for sure! Isn't it, mother?"

"Ay, it is," exclaimed Mrs. Briggs, who, resplendent in a new dress, stood by her husband's side; "but she deserves it all. I am prouder than I can say to be here in this beautiful old house, and it is good of you to invite us, Nancy."

"I wanted to. It's been the dream of my life ever since I've known you, Mrs. Briggs, to ask you to spend the first Christmas with me. And I'm glad you like the house."

"Ay, it's beautiful. Of course, to be plain, I like Woodroyd better, but then, that's a matter of taste. This old panelling and the old furniture is simply wonderful, wonderful. Isn't it, Elijah?"

Nancy's eyes were sparkling with joy. She had long looked forward to this hour.

"Ay, it's grand!" repeated the honest Yorkshireman again and again. "But I do wish our Ben——"

"Nay, nay," broke in Mrs. Briggs, "we will have nothing about that. There mustn't be a shadow on Nancy's home-coming. Ay, and here's our Jessie with her young man. Don't you like it, Jessie?"

"It's lovely, just lovely!" cried the girl, "isn't it, Walter?" and Nancy saw not only Jessie Briggs but the young Yorkshire manufacturer to whom she had become engaged during the last few months.

"It's the loveliest place I ever saw," replied Walter Lister. "It's given me an idea, too. Jessie, I am not going to buy Primrose Villa; it will look poor and dowdy after this. I am going to buy that old house at Howden Clough. I thought it was too old-fashioned; but I don't now."

"I am glad, Walter," replied Jessie, looking proudly at the young man at her side. "Who is this, I wonder?" she added in a whisper.

At that moment a tall, scholarly-looking man entered the room.

"Professor Sheepshanks," pronounced old Adam Trebilcock, who to his heart's delight had again assumed his old position at Trevanion Court.

"Congratulations, my dear young friend," exclaimed the professor as he came up to Nancy. "It's the loveliest house I ever saw. No wonder you are proud of it. I am gladder than I can say that I——"

"Mr. John Shawcross. Mr. Tom Greenwood," announced old Adam proudly.

"Ay, we are all here," Elijah Briggs exclaimed. "It's grand, it's just grand! Just think of her inviting so many of her Leeds friends."

"What name did you say?" Adam was heard to ask a new-comer.

"Jake Crowther.—No, I'm noan Mester Jake Crowther; I'm just plain Jake. If you *must* mention my name, have it without any furbelows."

"Ay, Miss Nancy," cried Jake, going up to the girl, "I didn't expect this; and first of all I didn't mean to come. Leeds is good eno' for me, Chrismus or no Chrismus. Still I'm glad to be here, I am for sure! Ay, but you've a grand place here!"

Jake's advent was followed by several others who need no special mention.

They all sat down to dinner presently. Not a distinguished gathering perhaps, if we except Professor Sheepshanks; but surely never a kinder-hearted or a happier one. Laughter became infectious, while good wishes abounded.

Presently dinner was over, and then Elijah Briggs, who sat by Nancy's side, rose to his feet.

"Most of you I know," began the Yorkshireman; "most of you are friends of mine; and those who are

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not friends—well, I hope they'll become friends. At any rate, I can't let this occasion pass without saying a few words. Four years and half ago the young lady who is our hostess to-night came to my house in Leeds, and I fell in love with her straight away. Didn't I, mother?"

"Ay, you did," replied Mrs. Briggs with conviction.

"I did for sure. I told her so too; and nothing would have given me greater joy than to have her for a daughter. But that wasn't to be," and Mr. Briggs sighed. "However, I am not going to talk about that now. You know her story. This is her old home. Years ago it was, as it were, sold over her head. Her father left her a legacy; and her legacy was to get ten thousand pounds to buy it back. How she could ever get it she didn't know. But she promised her father she would, and she made up her mind to do it. . . .

"She's done it. . . .

"The story of how she did it is a romance, one of the best romances that I know of. Not that she could have done it without Leeds, and without old Amos Judson, a Leeds man; all the same, by her keenness, by her cleverness, and by her sterling worth, she has bought back her home, and we, her friends, are here to rejoice with her. Now mind: Yorkshire is better nor Cornwall; let there be no mistake about that; but when we come to lasses, I give in. There isn't a lass in Yorkshire, nay nor not in England, that's the equal of our young friend, and I want you on this Christmas Eve, on this, one of the gladdest occasions of my life, to drink the health of Miss Nancy Trevanion."

After this, speechmaking became the order of the day. Professor Sheepshanks spoke, so did Mr. Shawcross, while old Jake Crowther delighted all present by his broad Yorkshire dialect.

"She's a lass in a thousand," said old Jake, "and there are no flies on her. Mind that! There's only one thing she wants and that's a good 'usban'. If I were thirty years younger I'd have a shot at her myself; but

NANCY TREFRY'S SPEECH

"But I am not I can only say that a good straight lad'll turn up."

After this there was a general demand for a speech from Nancy, who laughingly responded.

"I am among friends," she said; "perhaps the best friends ever a girl had, and so I can speak freely."

She retailed the story of the last four and a half years, she acknowledged her indebtedness to old Amos Judson and spoke of her love for Mary. In warmest terms she referred to her indebtedness to Eliah and Milt Briggs, and spoke of her friendship with Jessie.

"There is only one word more I have to say," she concluded, "and that is in reference to what Mr Jake Crowther has just mentioned. He said the one thing wanting was a husband for me. Well, I've something to tell you. I've kept it a secret to the last, just as the best wine in the story of the Gospels was kept until the last. I should never have been able to succeed in doing what Professor Sheepshanks so graphically referred to, but for Mr. John Trefry, who is sitting by my side. But for his discovery of what was wanting, all the rest would have been in vain. Ever since we were children he made everything possible. We have known each other for years, and—and—there's something else——"

The girl stopped and blushed, while all looked wonderingly at each other.

"I've not only invited you to dinner at my old home on this my home-coming on Christmas Eve," went on Nancy "Although you did not know it, I also invited you to my wedding to-morrow morning, Christmas morning, at our old church. I am afraid it's a very informal invitation, but—but—I hope you will all come. - Don't you, John?"

John tried to reply, but could not; no words would pass his lips, but on turning towards Nancy their eyes met, and then the two kissed each other before them all.

